

THE SUBLIME PERVERSION OF CAPITAL: MARXISM AND THE
NATIONAL QUESTION IN MODERN JAPANESE THOUGHT

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Beginning from the dramatic changes which took place in the early 1930s in the dominant historical logic of Marxism at the time, that is, when the Kōza, or “Lectures” faction published their major historical statement, the 8-volume *Nihon shihonshugi hattatsu-shi kōza* (Lectures on the History of Development of Japanese Capitalism) corresponding to the Comintern’s 1932 Thesis on Japan, I theoretically trace the problem of the “national question,” in other words, the theories of the distinguishing or *specific* characteristics of the Japanese situation through the interwar period and into the early postwar. The “national question” remained the decisive center around which Marxists considered the strategies and tactics of politics, as well as the means and methods of writing history. I examine certain Kōza faction theorists, in particular Yamada Moritarō, in order to *theoretically* consider their discussion of the national question in terms of the history of the development of Japanese capitalism. What they considered the uneven temporal sequences of development (supposedly “proven” by Japan’s supposedly “semi-feudal” social basis in the countryside) can also be read as a debate on the temporalities and epistemic ordering mechanisms implied in the formation and constitution of *specific difference* itself, a debate on the question of how capital *localizes* itself, how capital acts as if it is a “natural” outgrowth of a putatively “given” situation. In the pursuit of this broad conceptual point – both the rethinking of the theoretical implications of the national question today and the rethinking of the specifically theoretical implications of the aftermath of the debate on Japanese capitalism – I revisit Uno Kōzō’s powerful intervention into the basic questions of this debate through extensive reinvestigations of Marx’s work, and take up certain corollary developments in the works of Tanigawa Gan and Tosaka Jun.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Gavin Walker was born in New York City. He is Assistant Professor of History and East Asian Studies at McGill University in Montréal, Québec. He received his BA and MA degrees from the University of Pennsylvania, where he also taught at the Center for Programs in Contemporary Writing, and received his PhD from Cornell University. He has been a Visiting Researcher at Hitotsubashi University in Tokyo and a Mellon Graduate Fellow at the Society for the Humanities at Cornell. His essays and translations have appeared in various edited volumes and journals such as *Shisō*, *Jōkyō*, *Gendai Shisō*, *positions: asia critique*, *Postcolonial Studies*, *Traces*, *Mechademia*, *Historical Materialism*, *Rethinking Marxism*, *Interventions*, and *Socialism & Democracy*, among others. His current work includes *The Archive of Revolution: Marxist Historiography in Modern Japan* (in collaboration with Katsuya Hirano) and *Area and the Regime of Civilizational Difference: Biopolitics, Geopolitics, History*, a special issue of *positions: asia critique* (in collaboration with Naoki Sakai).

To my parents

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NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS

Throughout this dissertation, all translations from materials written in languages other than English are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

For the transliteration of Japanese language, I use the Modified Hepburn system, with the macron indicating a long vowel, i.e., *kaikyū tōsō*. Terms in Japanese, in particular proper nouns or place names that have an established usage in English, i.e., Tokyo, are not modified with diacritics.

THREE ORIENTATIONS

Our task today is nothing less than the task of creating a form or symbolization of the world. [...] This task is a struggle. In a sense, it is a struggle of the West against itself, of capital against itself. It is a struggle between two infinities, or between extortion and exposition. It is the struggle of thought, very precisely concrete and demanding, in which we are engaged by the disappearing of our representations of the abolishing or overcoming of capital. *It demands that we open or discern in capital another type or another kind of a flaw than what we understood to be insurmountable contradictions*, and that capital was able to overcome, thus overcoming also our representations. [...] The moment has come *to expose capital to the absence of reason, for which capital provides the fullest development*: and this moment comes from capital itself, but it is no longer a moment of a “crisis” that can be solved in the course of the process. It is a different kind of moment to which we must give thought.

- Jean-Luc Nancy

Although a purely capitalist society can never be concretely realized, the fact that at a certain stage of development it begins to develop in this pure direction by means of its own forces, and the fact that its underside or verso expresses a historical process in which this development is reversed, forcing capitalism to anticipate its own termination, simultaneously forces the theoretical systematization of this process towards its own completion or perfection. From the outset, a commodity economy is something in which the relation between one society and another penetrates back into the interior of each society itself and secures this moment as its ground – a commodity economy must contain a fundamental (im)possibility, an absence or “*nihil*” of reason (*muri*) in as much as it expresses and treats relations among human beings as relations among things, and yet it is paradoxically the precise fact that this (im)possibility (*muri*) itself has paradoxically developed as a form capable of ordering the totality of society that renders possible our own theoretical systematization of its motion.

- Uno Kōzō

Empirical concepts bear on the determinations of the singularity of concrete objects – that is, on the *fact* that such a social formation presents such and such a configuration, traits, particular arrangements, which characterize it as *existing*. [...] But this term must not lead us into error. Empirical concepts are not pure *givens*, not the pure and simple tracing, not the pure and simple immediate reading, of reality. They are themselves the result of a whole process of knowledge, containing several levels or degrees of elaboration. [...] By ‘empirical concepts’ then, we do not mean the initial *material* but the result of successive elaborations; we mean the result of a process of knowledge, itself complex, wherein the initial material, and then the raw material obtained, are transformed into empirical concepts by the effect of the intervention of *theoretical concepts*, present either explicitly, or at work within this transformative process in the form of experimental settings, rules of method, of criticism and interpretation.

- Louis Althusser

Prologue: The Sublime Perversion of Capital

When Jean-Luc Nancy exhorts us to “open or discern in capital another type or another kind of a flaw than what we understood to be insurmountable contradictions,” he reminds us that that capital *was able* or *has been able* to overcome these seemingly “insurmountable contradictions,” and thus has also *successfully overcome our representations*.¹ In other words, the inherent incompleteness of capital, the tendency to immiserate its own social basis of reproduction, the inner conflict between the relations of production and the development of the productive forces, all moments thought to be *direct* and *immediate* contradictions have been historically *surmounted* or *overcome*, but this does not mean that they have been *resolved*. Here, we will call this “other type” or “other kind” of flaw *the sublime perversion of capital*. In essence, what I intend by this phrase is to develop a formal taxonomy of capital’s tendency towards the “inversion” and “reversal” of its own misfortunes, its constant and relentless transformation of *limits* into *thresholds*, its capacity to thrive on and invert its own contradictions into developments or extensions. We will seek the clarification of this perversion by circling around certain topics related to the debate on Japanese capitalism, perhaps the most formative debate in modern Japanese intellectual history, and develop its aftermath, particularly in the theoretical work of Uno Kōzō, in the poetics of Tanigawa Gan, and the aesthetic analyses of Tosaka Jun.

In his writings on Marx, Karatani Kōjin has pointed out to us something

¹ J-L. Nancy, *La création du monde, ou mondialisation* (Paris: Galilée, 2002).

fundamental that we must repeatedly recall when confronted with the the phenomenal presentation of this thing called “capital,” a thing that is not strictly a thing as such, but a congealed “spiritual concrete” that originates as *a social relation*:

What I would like to focus on is not how capital’s self-reproduction is possible but why capital’s movement has to continue *endlessly*. Indeed this is *interminable* and *without telos*. If merchant capital (or mercantilism) that runs after money (gold) is a perversion, then industrial capital, that appears to be more productive, has been bequeathed this perversion. In fact, before the advent of industrial capital, the whole apparatus of capitalism, including the credit system, had already been complete; industrial capital began within the apparatus and altered it according to its disposition. Then what is the perversion that motivates the economic activity of capitalism? It is the fetishism of money.

At the fountainhead of capitalism, Marx discovered the miser, who lives the fetishism of money in reality. [...] Ironically, the miser is materially disinterested, just like the devotee who is indifferent to this world in order to ‘accumulate riches in heaven’. In a miser there is a quality akin to religious perversion. Therefore, if one sees the sublime in religious perversion, one should see the same in a miser’s perversion; or if one sees a certain vulgar sentiment in the miser, one should see the same in the religious perversion. It is the same sublime perversion.²

Karatani derives this logic of the shift from Marx’s fetishism of commodities to the more fundamental fetishism of money (and ultimately the fetishism of capital itself) from Uno Kōzō, who made this important corrective to Marx.³ But what underpins this moment in the form of the “sublime perversion” presented in the nucleus of capital is this torsion between on the one hand, capital’s *endlessness*, its untraceable and repeating origin

² Karatani Kōjin, “Chikuseki to shin’yō: Tasha kara no tōsō,” originally published in *Gunzō*, 1985, reprinted in *Tankyū I* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1992), excerpts from 127, 134-135, 137-140. This set of remarks is partly translated into English in *Architecture as Metaphor: Language, Number, Money*, trans. Sabu Kohso (MIT Press, 1995), 173, and later rewritten in a slightly different and condensed form in *Toransukuritiiku: Kanto to Marukusu* (Tokyo: Hihyō Kūkan, 2001), 310-311; *Transcritique: On Kant and Marx*, trans. Sabu Kohso (MIT Press, 2005), 209. Translations modified and edited.

³ On this point see Uno Kōzō, *Keizai genron* [first version] in *Uno Kōzō chosakushū*, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1974). Uno’s argument here, based on Marx’s incomplete analysis in Volume 3 of *Capital* around the crucial concept of “automatically interest-bearing capital” (*sore jishin rishi o umu mono toshite no shihon*), was deeply influential in Marxist theory in Japan in the 1960s and 70s. It remains an underdeveloped field of questions, particularly because it provided a certain formal intervention into the distinction between *commodification*, *reification*, and *alienation*, three quite distinct concepts that are often erroneously conflated in Marxist theoretical work.

which is erased over and over again by the expression of the exchange process which appears as a smooth circle without beginning or end; and on the other, capital's *seeming* impossibility, its inability to control its drive towards its own suicide or transcendence of itself, expressed in the fact that capital must pursue the immiseration of the historical body of the worker, on which it nevertheless relies for the reproduction of labor power, that is, for the *consumption* of the very products it would produce. This “vicious circle” in Marx is described by the term *fehlerhaften Kreislauf*, which we might rather translate as a “defective circle,” a circuit that arrogates itself as a circular interiority, but that can never completely overwrite the internal elements that undermine its very operation.⁴

Karatani locates this “sublime perversion” in the parallax between its two elements: the sublime of religious experience and the perversion of the fetish. But if we were to unpack this phrase in more detail, we would immediately be thrown back on the fact that capital as a social relation is itself from the beginning nothing more than *the* sublime perversion, the raising of perversion to a principle capable of ordering and maintaining social relations in its image. In this homology or conspiracy between the element of sublimity and the element of perversion, we see an entire sequence of ways of describing *how* capital operates. In other words, it is not that capitalist society is “perverted” or “sublime” in the two senses of “disabled” or “perfected” – it is that because capitalist society is so exquisitely perverse, and thereby perfectly sublime, not in spite of its “defects” but because of them, that it works at all. What we are then exposed to in this analysis is an extended meditation devoted to expanding what Marx called the “demented form” (*verrückten Form*) in which capital appears, the “dementia” of

⁴ On this analysis of this term, see the important analysis of Yutaka Nagahara in his *Warera kashi aru mono tachi: Han-'shihon'ron no tame ni* (Tokyo: Seidosha, 2008).

capitalist society consisting in the fact that this thing, which should be impossible, manages to paradoxically work quite well.

This “sublime perversion” of capital, located at the core of the formation of the “real abstraction,” ought to be read alongside another “perversion,” a profoundly *historical* perversion, this time pointed out by Nagasaki Hiroshi in 1968:

The modern image of the world is itself a sort of perversion. In *Capital*, labor is separated from its correlation with useful labor (*nützlicher Arbeit*), and presupposed in the general form of the labor power commodity, thus providing for the first time the possibility for it to be developed *in principle*, that is, dialectically. This is the case for all “logics of the dialectic,” not only the dialectic of the commodity, but also all instances of the dialectics of being and knowing that informed other fields of the experiential sciences. For the modern sciences, in particular all those developments of science that took mathematics as a model, the necessary presupposition has always been a *formal* grasp of its subject matter. The history of science provides us with numerous examples of the emptiness of resistance born from the contemporary forms of natural history based on the observation and cataloging of what is empirically given. And yet, most academic discussions continue to discard the correlation between the givenness of the material object and the labor-praxis that furnished the basis of the development of modern science and technique. This active forgetting at the foundations of modernity is nothing more than an immense perversion.⁵

Nagasaki’s argument, recalling Lukács among others, emphasizes the tendency, long ago identified by Marx, for the concreteness of labor to “vanish in its product,” for the historical actuality of all the microscopic elements of oppression to be telescoped simply into labor-outcomes, providing us with for instance, a chair, rather than an aggregate material substratum of forest clearances, factory labor, conflicts over the working day, and so forth. As Nagasaki argues, this forgetting of labor lies at the basis also of capitalist development taken on the most abstract level. In other words, what appears at all times to

⁵ Nagasaki Hiroshi, “Hanranron,” originally published in the November 1968 issue of *Jōkyō*, republished in *Hanranron* (Tokyo: Sairyūsha, 1991), 29-30. It is important to point out that this text of Nagasaki, one of, if not *the* single most influential text of the Japanese ’68, explicitly and regularly utilizes one of Uno Kōzō’s important conceptual innovations, the term *muri* (“im/possibility” or what I will later call the “*nihil* of reason”), but does not cite Uno directly. See chapter 4 for a long development of this concept.

be the natural progression of technique, of ideas corresponding to a specific technical and social basis with a specific balance of forces, is in fact a composite of a vast array of practices, aspects of human social labor that congeal themselves into a product, an idea, a theoretical system, and so forth, but that can never erase their genesis as a function of labor itself, a perversion that is concentrated in the form of the labor power commodity.⁶

These two perversions are subtended by “the national question” – the element that inserts a “swerve” or that interrupts the expected developmental process of capital. These perversions all are essentially moments of *the sublime perversion of capital*, capital’s capacity to realize itself precisely in such a way as to appear “indigenous,” “natural,” or a “necessary” outcome of history.⁷ In attempting to follow this complex and broad question towards various possible theoretical outcomes, the following dissertation therefore, is not principally concerned with figures in the empirico-archival sense, but rather with a chain

⁶ On this point, there would be a possibility of dialogue between Nagasaki’s work and the tendencies around Negri. Negri and his particular strain of *operaismo* have always emphasized the subjective dimension of technical innovation, to the extent of developing the theory of “exodus” (this term is most specifically associated with Paolo Virno) from the base of capital’s developmental curve, leaving it to collapse under the withdrawal of labor. Needless to say, behind this possible dialogue would be a larger reexamination of Lukács as a “secret” voice or silent presence behind Negri’s work, and in general behind the global ’68.

⁷ Here, this “swerve” of course refers to the work of the later Althusser on the concept of “aleatory materialism.” This term serves in Althusser’s late work as a formalization of the theory of the “clinamen” in Epicurus, a concept that then appears in varying forms: the question of contingency, the primacy of relations over the terms of the relation, the analysis of *virtù* and *fortuna* in Machiavelli, and so forth. Recently, however, it has been argued that this “aleatory materialism” in Althusser should not simply be conceived as finding in “contingency” a new telos, as if things could be easily settled by simply replacing the older Hegelian necessity with a newer “aleatory” orientation. See here a number of the essays in *Encountering Althusser: Politics and Materialism in Contemporary Radical Thought*, ed. Katja Diefenbach, et al. (London: Continuum, 2012). I fully share this view. What I hope to develop in this dissertation concerns contingency, of course. In fact, it is a central concern. But if we want to provide a theoretical development of Althusser’s late work, particularly in relation to Marxist *historical analysis*, I believe it is necessary to rethink this discussion of contingency and necessity in terms of the *torsion* between them, between history and logic, the most fundamental and difficult problem in the analysis of Marx’s work. What I refer to here as the “sublime perversion” of capital is precisely the work of the torsion of this doublet. We will see in the next chapter how this “double” structure operates concretely.

of related questions that circle around this sublime perversion of capital. As a point of departure, this chain originates with the so-called “national question” in Marxist theory. This question will thus be theorized along two lines: the historical level, at which the national question appears as the “agrarian question,” the question of the status of the “world,” and the question of “backwardness” or historical time; and the level of theory itself, in which the national question appears as the logic of beginning, origin, genesis, the impossibility that this particular order should emerge at all, the paradox of the commencement of a system that appears to erase its own contingent origins. However, it goes without saying that figures and texts are somehow involved. In other words, although this dissertation is not *principally* concerned with figures as such, it can be said to have a central figure who receives top billing, and a diverse “supporting cast.” This central figure is Uno Kōzō, whose work not only plays the role of analytical object, but also theoretically informs the background of other analyses in the text. The supporting actors or “dramatis personae” who appear here are varied – some have mere cameos, while others perhaps should have received top billing as well in a “director’s cut” – drawn from an international actor’s union that cannot be described in “civilizational” or “national” terms. But this dissertation does not privilege or even accept the biographical mode of analysis, for a number of reasons that will be developed throughout the text.

First and foremost, the arrangement of figures, situations, and questions herein presumes a figurative capacity of theoretical and historical writing that is to some extent hostile to the concept of “context.” From another vantage point entirely, “here individuals are dealt with only in so far as they are the personifications of economic categories, embodiments of particular class-relations and class-interests. My standpoint, from which

the evolution of the economic formation of society is viewed as a process of natural history, can less than any other make the individual responsible for relations whose creature he socially remains, however much he may subjectively raise himself above them.”⁸ Between the refusal of context and the complete determination by context, I try above all to utilize certain historical circumstances to force into existence certain theoretical effects, effects that are not necessarily accounted for in the circumstances themselves. This attempt therefore, is not as much a history as it is a theoretical analysis of the possibility of a history.

This dissertation attempts to trace a theoretical genealogy of certain central thematics of Marxist theory in the Japanese context, but it is not limited to the proper name “Japan.” Rather, this is an exercise in a simultaneous act of decontextualization and recontextualization, focusing on a set of theoretical objects – the sense of history in historical materialism, the question of the original, or primitive accumulation, and the national question, the question of the formation process of the identificatory mechanism called “nation” – rather than a set of empirico-archival circumstances. I would like to decompose the substantiality and accepted genealogical ordering of this debate and reassemble it with an aim to using it as a launching pad from which to set out a new genealogy for Marxist theoretical writing and Marxist thought in the Japanese context. But I am simultaneously attempting to break and sunder the suture between “context” and “nation.” Without doing so, it is impossible to clarify the theoretical role and epistemological problems of “the national question.” That is, if the national question is simply understood as something whose substantiality is “proven” or legitimated by its

⁸ Marx, Preface to the first German edition, *Capital*, vol. 1 in *Collected Works of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels*, vol. 35 (New York: International Publishers, 1996).

specific “national context,” there will immediately be no point in investigating it at all, since the uncanny “national object” at its center will already be operating in a perfect circle of self-referentiality, supposedly “proving” itself by means of its own production, its “context.” Therefore, I am also attempting in this dissertation to intervene against “contextualization,” or perhaps more accurately, to insist on another conception of context, one that is not “naturally” linked to the “forcefield” of “area.” Rather than thus “contextualize” the following investigations extensively, I would simply point out that the basic historical moment that is in question in this book is a re-reading of certain aspects of thought that emerge around the so-called “debate on Japanese capitalism” (*Nihon shihonshugi ronsō*), which can be understood as the pivotal and cyclically recurring “origin” of modern Japanese social thought. This debate is not treated as the constant object of analysis but as a point of departure for diverse theoretical discussions. This debate has received attention in a wide variety of sources, but in my view, nothing about it has been “determined,” “fixed,” or conclusively “analyzed.” In other words, in contrast to the dominant presentation of this moment, which is typically “sorted out” or neatly categorized into a historical field of data, I want to attempt to read this debate as theory, that is, to not simply turn this vast and complex field of questions into something that merely comforts our sense of historical completeness and systematicity or that confirms our supposedly “insightful” fantasies of the other space. In essence, the following chapters are attempts to elucidate this uncanny historical object called “the debate on Japanese capitalism” by expanding, disaggregating, and recomposing its aspects into new theoretical inquiries. While I attempt to clarify and analyze this debate as a wide-ranging moment that lies behind much of twentieth century Japanese

intellectual history and cultural production, I do not merely want to “sort back through it.”⁹ This “sorting” has already been done in many languages, and it is not necessary to simply restate “the facts.” Rather, in Deleuze’s terms, I would like to stealthily approach the so-called “facts” of the debate on Japanese capitalism, but “take them from behind and give them a child they did not anticipate.” This illegitimate child or bastard offspring of the debate on Japanese capitalism would serve to tear us away from the simplistic and self-congratulatory way in which these “facts” have been previously understood, instead restoring the political dynamics of the “facts” of the debate precisely as the “facts of the streets” (*gaitō no jijitsu*) in Tosaka Jun’s phrase. Rather than simply take the debate on Japanese capitalism as a neat package that gives us some supposed “insight” into the “special” and “Japanese” path to “development” or “modernization,” we ought to hold ourselves immanent to the theorecticality of this debate, to restore its uncanniness, its disquieting features. Although the dominant modality of understanding of this debate has been to simply trace back through it, “rationalize” it as something which has been comfortingly “dealt with”, and thereby render it a static and passive “object” of inquiry, I would rather try to restore this moment to a living and active theoretical “form of life” whose questions we ourselves are still entirely enmeshed in, a “hazardous” and even “dangerous” cycle of theoretical openings that expose and disclose the abyssal logic of the “rationality” of social-historical life that we often “neatly” and “bravely” imagine is obvious.

Before we enter into the various theoretical problems themselves therefore, let me briefly expand on what I mean here by “context.”

⁹ This point is made in an important essay by Nagahara Yutaka, “A Sketch on the Hauntology of Capital” in *Keizai shirin*, 66:2 (Tokyo: Hōsei University, October 1998), 143-162.

Against Context

The question of context is always an undecidable element and never something fixed. But context as a schema, by managing the theoretical surroundings of theory, its “milieu,” is always operating by means of a doubling. Context can never be sustained as a pure environment in which the individual phenomenon arises. Insofar as context is intended to name the backdrop or situation in which something may occur or in which something may be sited (also: cited), there is nevertheless always a gap or leap between this organized background and the practical linkage that is drawn to the phenomenon, the statement, the text, the historical moment, and so forth. In fact, the act of contextualization is always thereby not a means of fixing or determining the “proper” identity and unity of some phenomenon, but paradoxically, is exactly that which undermines the unity of what must appear unitary. Every semiotic effect can be cited, can be formed into the citation, thereby “site-ing” it and placing it within an economy of visibility, placing it within “sight” or “in range”. But precisely because of this openness of the structure of citation or the “graft” of writing itself, writing or the textuality of the social surface can “engender infinitely new contexts in an absolutely nonsaturable fashion,” that is, context itself can be made to operate as the conceptual lever of an entirely divergent “differential trace,” whereby the supposedly “original” set of effects and sequencing of elements is exposed or opened to another writing, another sequence.¹⁰

In this sense, contextualization is not a transparent technique, a clear and

¹⁰ See here Jacques Derrida, “Signature Event Context” in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 320.

unalloyed means by which to clarify the local, situated, original elements around which a figure, concept, statement and so on emerged. Contextualization always contains a certain politicality. In fact, the demand to contextualize along the lines of national boundaries is not inherently or necessarily problematic. It is crucial to determine the specific, concrete social boundaries that historical phenomena are exposed to in their sites of emergence, the forms of thought and forms of life according to which these phenomena are produced and in which they circulate. What is however problematic, is the understanding of “context” to be *solely* referential to this boundary of the putative unity of national language and national community. That is, posed in this way, we might also say that the demand for “context” itself can be a block on “contextualization.”

The example of the history of modern philosophical thought in Japan, that is, the so-called Kyoto school philosophy, is a good one in this case. Let us recall that figures such as Nishida Kitarō, Tanabe Hajime, Miki Kiyoshi, and so forth all formulate certain conceptual apparatuses that characterize their philosophical projects through intensive reading strategies of the “Western” philosophical tradition – for Nishida, the rethinking of Aristotle’s *hypokeimenon*, for Tanabe, the importance of the regulative idea in terms of Kant’s understanding of “schema,” for Miki the force of “imagination” and “creation” in the historical world. When we attempt to sum up these projects in thought, immediately we are confronted with the problem of “context.” As soon as we attempt to “explain” or “clarify” the philosophical projects of these thinkers on the basis that the “context” of their ideas was some putative conceptual unity of the Japanese tradition, we lose sight of the fact that their context, that is, the proper and formative context of their ideas was precisely and directly modern European philosophy itself. Now, the typical culturalist

explanation reacts to such a statement by arguing that this erases and elides “what is Japanese” in these thinkers, that it merely reduces them to “imitators” of European thought. But we can see in this type of formulation – incapable of imagining that *modern European thought could take place in Japan* – that the tendency to concatenate historical acts of thought into representative inscriptions of national-cultural difference is not an attempt to return such thought to its proper context, but rather a violent and destructive decontextualization, the demand for which stems from a refusal to understand the historicity of the international world itself.

This is why, despite the seemingly obvious nature of such an argument, it remains important to point out that the concept of context is almost always treated on the basis of a schema of specific difference. That is, context frequently is taken to mean the situating of a historical product – concepts, arrangements, assemblages, modes of life, rituals, practices, and so forth – within a national, civilizational, cultural, or traditional set of boundaries, according to which the situatedness of the product would be “understood.” That is, by placing the historical product into a “context” the “texted” part of the product would be given its systematicity from an already-established schematic, through which it could be inserted into a genealogy, a hierarchy, an arrangement or organization of historical products. It is in this sense that the injunction to contextualize concepts, ideas, and thought is almost always conflated with the notion of historicization. To contextualize a given concept would be an act of placing this concept within the linguistic system in which it was first articulated, or would be a placement of the concept within a specific national or institutional history – how, for instance, a certain school of thought modified and transmitted a given conceptual register between generations or specific

institutional sites and bodies. But the paradox that we must confront is not simply that this type of contextualization tends to treat the national, civilizational, or in any case *differential* context as a given. More crucially, it is that this type of contextualization, rather than succeeding in historicizing the object of analysis, excludes its historicity. How does this exclusion or erasure operate?

When, for instance, we take up the analysis of a central figure of modern Japanese intellectual history, for example, Uno Kōzō, largely the subject of this dissertation, we often first attempt to draw the historical contours of his background: where he was trained institutionally, the particular local environment of his hometown, the topics and forms of analysis undertaken by his friends, classmates, and circle of interlocutors, and so on. In this way, we establish for him a “place” within a particular historical moment, and in particular historical circumstances. Then, we would examine Uno’s work, opening up an inquiry into why Marxist theory and historiography enjoyed such a deep level of development in the Japanese university system and among the most influential practitioners of the social sciences in Japan. In turn, this inquiry would allow the writer to “situate” Uno’s work on Marx, and on the development of the critical analysis of capitalism, within a particular discursive space in Japan, profoundly concerned with the prospects and historical background for the development of the Japanese economy. Thus, Uno’s work would become a part of, and commentary on, Japanese development. However, and here we see what is most troubling with the predominant mode of “contextualization,” Uno’s work has effectively disappeared. It has been subsumed under the primacy of a narrative, a story that would tell us that those intellectuals like Uno were in effect merely producing sub-narratives of the general ebb and flow of “Japan.” Context

here functions simply to imagine that the natural and given position of a historical product – a set of concepts, a body of texts, a mode of thinking – is “within” the form of the nation.

It is not simply a case of somehow “removing” this framework of “nation” and replacing it with another, a methodological act which might produce interesting effects, but which still would not trouble the treatment of context as given or natural. What context here is excluding is *creation*, the dynamics of historicity as the fluctuating and hazardous field of creative potential. Context treated as natural or given implies that the schema in which some historical product would be placed is always-already *saturated* from the outset, fully developed as a schema in which objects and concepts could simply be placed, subjecting them to a natural or inherent form of ordering. But if this is the case, history would not be a field of creation, an *evental* field – and here I want to mark something quite different from the concept of *histoire événementielle* that Fernand Braudel for instance, dismissed as a mere agglomeration of dates and places – that is, history would be, in some sense, already complete. What we would be doing by this contextualization into a “complete” history then, would place ourselves, and our historical act of situating, positing, and ordering, *outside of history*. We would then be located in the field of supposedly “rational” and “immediate” capacity for self-understanding, such that we could continue to produce a history, in which an ever-increasing number of products are continually being rediscovered and re-situated, but whose borders and limits in extension would always-already be known.

This then, would deny precisely the historicity of our own writing of history, the historicity in which the written line intersects explosively with the historical object, the

sense of creation – *poiesis* – in which history is never a simply passive field of placement, but a forcefield of energy and dynamism in which historical objects are in a constant flux of relationality, entering into and exiting from relations and modes of articulation whose fluctuating dynamics are themselves profoundly historical. This entire space of torsion, of folding and unfolding onto itself is the field of historicity, in which our situatedness is always placed. If we were to pursue a concept of context that assumed easily that a thinker, an object, or a text could be located in a firm genealogy or in a determinate chain of reactions as in the physical sciences, we would be required to exclude this historicity of creation. Yet, no teleological act in the historical world, which we irreversibly inhabit, can be thought outside history. Instead, contextualization that treats seriously this historicity of social relations must proceed as itself an act of creation. Why, for instance, should we assume that a temporal register of the apportioning of periodicity is enough to situate two thinkers “in context”? The register of temporality is merely one way in which a relation of situatedness can be drawn.

We might instead ask after the context of the concept of “face,” for instance, a concept that would draw together Spinoza, Deleuze, archaic sculpture, the history of affective significations associated with facial expressions, the history of medical and criminal analysis on the basis of physiognomy, the historical differentiation of facial features in divergent organizations of social life (the economy of noses, of beards, of eye color, of hair-styles, etc), the sense of “face” in “surface,” the development of a concept of “side” or “plane” in mathematics and geometry, and so on. This “face-context” then, might well serve as one creative modality of explication of the forces and dynamics operating within a given sequence of thinkers. What matters above all in the formation

and unfolding of such a sequence is the act of creation or of articulation which allows the heterogeneous elements to become a sequence. What is troubling in the sequence of context called “nation” is not the fact that heterogeneous elements are concatenated into a unity, since all acts of historical analysis in language undertake this concatenation – after all, the articulation between multiple elements in order to generate effects is the originary and primal mode of creation, of *poetics* in the historical sense. What is troubling is the historical formation of ideology within which the sequence “nation” or “Man” comes to play a role of primacy, arrogating itself as an primordial or natural arrangement.

1. The Feudal Remnant and the Historical Outside

[Марксизм] засыпает песком и поливает
дезинфекционной жидкостью помойные ямы истории.

Marxism covers the rubbish pits of history with sand
and sprays them with disinfectant.¹

- N.I. Bukharin

Although it is a remarkably little-known fact outside of research on the history of Japanese philosophy and social thought, Marxism was one of the most dominant strands of theoretical inquiry in Japanese intellectual life throughout the bulk of the 20th century: from its initial entry into the Japanese intellectual world in the late 1800s, Marxist analysis quickly came to constitute a vast and osmotic field that permeated all aspects of academic life, artistic practices, forms of political organization, and ways of analyzing the social situation. Numerous episodes testify to this: for example, the first language in which a *Collected Works* of Marx and Engels was published was not German, Russian, English, nor any other European language, but was in fact, Japanese.²

¹ N.I. Bukharin, *Filosofskie arabeski (Dialekticheski ocherki)* in *Tyuremnye rukopisi*, t. 2 (Moscow: Airo-KhKh, 1996), 31; *Philosophical Arabesques*, trans. Renfrey Clarke (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2005), 35-36.

² The first version in the world of Marx and Engels' collected works was produced by the publishing house Kaizōsha (Tokyo) between 1928 and 1935 in 32 volumes, edited by Sakisaka Itsurō, et al. On the history of this first edition, see Murata Yōichi, "Hōyaku ME zenshū, senshū to MEGA" (The Japanese translation of the Marx-Engels collected works and selected works in relation to the new *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe*) in *Atarashii MEGA: Shin Marukusu-Engerusu zenshū, Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe 1974*, Kyokutō Shoten News Bulletin (Tokyo: Kyokutō Shoten, 1973), 24-28. On the beginnings of Marxist theoretical work in Japan, see Suzuki Kōichirō, *Shihonron to Nihon [Capital and Japan]* (Tokyo: Kobundō, 1950). On the history of the exchanges within the Comintern and the Moscow-based Instituta K. Marksa F. Engel'sa (later the Institut Marksizma-Leninizma, and now the Institut teorii i istorii sotsializma) on the compilation of the first Japanese-language collected works of Marx and Engels, see Ōmura Izumi's recent "Futatsu no Nihongo-ban 'Marukusu-Engerusu zenshū' no kikaku: Takano Iwasaburō to D. Ryazanofu no kutō – Kominterun to shōgyōshugi shuppan no hazama de" (Two Plans for the

Contours of the Debate on Japanese Capitalism

This dominance of Marxism in Japanese academic fields such as political economy, sociology, history, and so forth, is only part of the story. There is also a decisive political history that underpins the massive influence of Marxist theoretical inquiry in the Japanese situation. After the formation of the Japan Communist Party (*Nihon kyōsantō*) in 1922, internal debate in Marxist theory centered at first around the questions of Marxist philosophy (in the major Marxist theorists of the 1910s and 20s such as Kawakami Hajime, Yamakawa Hitoshi, and Fukumoto Kazuo, among others): the theoretical grasp of subjectivity, the problem of alienation, and the historical necessity of the revolutionary mission of the proletariat. After enjoying a level of support in the early 1920s, Fukumoto's austere obsession with the correct line, what would later be understood as the theory of the "primacy of correct ideas" – the standpoint of so-called "*bunri ketsugō*" or, the unification of the party by removing ideologically incorrect elements (literally "unity in separation")³ – became the target of denunciation during the

Japanese version of "Marx-Engels Collected Works": The Struggle of Takano Iwasaburō and David Ryazanov – Between the Comintern and Commercial Publishing) in *Ōhara shakai mondai kenkyūjō zasshi* [Bulletin of the Ōhara Institute for Social Research] (617), no. 1-24 (March 2010) (Tokyo: Hōsei Daigaku Ōhara shakai mondai kenkyūjō). The existence of these early editions of the *Collected Works* discloses to us the massive intellectual and political community already in place in the 1920s in Japan that undertook this labor of translation, editing, collection, printing, and so forth, which in Germany, Russia, France, England, the US, and elsewhere took many further decades to accomplish, despite the relative proximity of materials and capable collaborators. Today there exist numerous independent Japanese translations of all three volumes of *Capital* (including the various drafts, the so-called "Lachatre" version of vol. 1 in French, etc), and multiple different edited translations of the entire *Marx-Engels Werke* in Japanese, encompassing translations of numerous archival texts still unavailable in published form in any other language, a process continuing in the extensive Japanese collaboration on the ongoing *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe* project, based at the Institute for Social History in Amsterdam.

³ See Fukumoto Kazuo, "Hōkō tenkan wa ikanaru sho-katei o toru ka, wareware wa ima sono ikanaru katei o katei shitsutsu aru ka: Musansha ketsugō ni kan suru Marukusuteki genri" [What processes constitute the "turning point" and which of these processes are we currently

time of publication of the 1927 Comintern Theses, largely authored under the influence of N. I. Bukharin (henceforth and still to this day in Marxist theoretical work in Japan, the term “Fukumotoism” is used to dismissively critique a certain hysterical insistence on purity of line, perhaps similar to the figure of Amadeo Bordiga in the European situation). The Comintern-JCP ‘27 Thesis began to lay out a theoretical line which emphasized the “two-stage” theory of the revolution: Japan was not a fully realized modern state, but still overwhelmed with “feudal remnants” in the form of parasitic landlordism, and so forth, and it was this analysis of the stage of development of Japanese capitalism that initiated the beginnings of the split which would come to a head with the ‘32 Thesis. As the major “developed” country relative to its neighboring states and primary imperialist power in East Asia, the Comintern considered Japan the most important and pivotal target for the revolutionary project, but in the wake of the ‘27 Thesis, which emphasized that the 1868 Meiji Restoration had not yet been fully accomplished as the necessary bourgeois-democratic revolution and transition to modern world capitalism, the question thus emerged: was Japanese capitalism in the 1930s ready for socialist revolution – in the conditions on the ground, was it possible to discover the revolutionary subject of this process?

In the clarification of this question emerged the famous and influential “debate on Japanese capitalism” (*Nihon shihonshugi ronsō*),⁴ a debate whose centerpiece was the

experiencing? On the Marxian principles of proletarian unity] in Takeuchi Yoshitomo, ed. *Gendai Nihon shisō taikēi* [Collection of Contemporary Japanese Thought], vol. 21 (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1965), 74-75.

⁴ For a general historical overview of the debate in European languages, see Germaine A. Hoston, *Marxism and the Crisis of Development in Prewar Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986) and Hiroomi Fukuzawa, *Aspekte der Marx-Rezeption in Japan: Spätkapitalisierung und ihre sozioökonomischen Folgen, dargestellt am Beispiel der japanischen Gesellschaft* (Bochum: Studienverlag Dr. N. Brockmeyer, 1981). Andrew E. Barshay’s *The Social Sciences in Modern*

clarification of the essential questions of mode of production and the historical process of articulation of the social formation: what stage of development was Japan actually in – how, and by what means, had Japanese capitalist development proceeded, and did there exist a concomitant total development of the social formation as a whole, thus producing the political consciousness necessary for the revolutionary transition? Was the basic

Japan: The Marxian and Modernist Traditions (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) addresses certain aspects of this debate, and Uno's work, from a perspective clearly inspired and influenced by Maruyama Masao's thought. See EH Norman's mimeographed "The Feudal Background of Japanese Politics". On Norman's contributions, and particularly on his relation to the debate on Japanese capitalism, see Harry D. Harootunian, "E. H. Norman and the Task for Japanese History" in *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 41, No. 4. (Winter, 1968-1969), pp. 545-552. For a theoretical attempt to read this moment in tandem with certain concerns of postcolonial studies, see Gavin Walker, "Postcoloniality and the National Question in Marxist Historiography: Elements of the Debate on Japanese Capitalism," in *Interventions*, vol. 13, no. 1 (London: Taylor & Francis, 2011), 120-137. Curtis Anderson Gayle's *Marxist History and Postwar Japanese Nationalism* (London: Routledge, 2003) analyzes the turn towards the "ethnic nation" in the postwar JCP orbit, touching on its relation to the debate in the 1930s. See also René Zapata's "Le marxisme au Japon: 1898-1937" and Kaoru Sugihara's "Le débat sur le capitalisme japonais (1927-1937)" in *Actuel Marx*, no. 2: *Le marxisme au Japon* (Paris: PUF, 1985), as well as Nagahara Yutaka's "A Sketch on the Hauntology of Capital" in *Keizai shirin*, 66:2 (Tokyo: Hōsei University, October 1998), 143-162. N.F. Leshchenko's «*Revoliutsiia Meidzi*» v *rabotakh Iaponskikh istorikov-marksistov* (Moscow: Nauka, 1984) analyzes numerous aspects of the debate's main theorists (focusing on the Kōza faction figures such as Noro Eitarō, Hani Gorō, Hattori Shisō, etc) in terms of their understanding of the 1868 Meiji Restoration, variously characterized as a bourgeois-democratic revolution or not. See also Leshchenko's "Sovetskaia istoriografiia Meidzi Isin i genezisa kapitalizma v Iaponii" in I.A. Latyshev, ed. *Rossia i Iaponiia v issledovaniakh Sovetskikh i Iaponskikh uchenykh* (Moscow: Nauka, 1986), 36-49, for a discussion of Soviet theoretical relations to the debate. In Japanese, the literature on the debate is obviously immense. The best general overview is Nagaoka Shinkichi's *Nihon shihonshugi ronso no gunzō* [A Portrait of the Debate on Japanese Capitalism] (Tokyo: Aoki Shoten, 1985), and the selections of primary texts collected and presented in Aoki Kōhei, ed. *Tennōsei kokka no tōshi: Nihon shihonshugi ronsō I* [Investigations of the Emperor-system State: The Debate on Japanese Capitalism I] (Tokyo: Shakai Hyōronsha, 1990) and Kasai Masaru, ed. *Sekai nōgyō mondai no kōzōka: Nihon shihonshugi ronsō II* [Structure of the World Agrarian Question: The Debate on Japanese Capitalism II] (Tokyo: Shakai Hyōronsha, 1990). The work of the theorist Ōuchi Tsutomu represents one of the best analyses of the history of the debate on Japanese capitalism, as well as its position in relation to Marxist theoretical inquiry as a whole. See in particular Ōuchi Tsutomu, *Nihon shihonshugi no nōgyō mondai*, rev. ed. (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1952); Ōuchi, *Nihon keizairon*, 2 vols. (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1963), republished also in *Ōuchi Tsutomu keizaigaku taikai*, vols. 7 and 8 (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 2000 and 2009 respectively). From a historical standpoint, the publication of the extensive declassified Comintern documents now contained in G. Adibekov et al, eds. *VKP(b), Komintern i Iaponiia, 1917-1941* (Moscow: Rossiiskaia politicheskaiia entsiklopediia [Rosspen], 2001) should be extremely significant as a resource for re-examining the position of Marxist theory in Japan in relation to the world communist movement of the prewar period.

economic category of social life in the villages – the form of land-tenancy rent (*kosakuryō*) – a “holdover” or “remnant” of feudalism, something *partially* feudal, or a product of the development of modern world capitalism? The debate on Japanese capitalism, in its encyclopedic sense, took place between the mid-1920s and the mid-to-late 1930s, a concentrated period of approximately 12-15 years. This debate, while unquestionably central to Marxist theory, had an exceptionally broad influence on the formation of Japanese social thought, and on the formation of the modern Japanese social sciences.

In the debate on these questions, there emerged roughly two positions: one, which became that of the Rōnō (“Labor-Farmer”) faction, who argued that the land reforms instituted in the 1868 Meiji Restoration – a bourgeois-democratic revolution – had begun the solution to the “backwardness” of the countryside, planting the initial seeds that would lead to full capitalist development; and another, which became that of the Kōza (“Lectures”) faction (representing the mainstream line of the JCP and the Comintern), who argued that the Restoration had not been a full bourgeois-democratic revolution, but rather an incomplete transition to modernity, and that Japanese capitalism was only partially developed, on a primarily feudal basis. The ‘27 Thesis, in splitting from earlier emphases on the immediate socialist revolutionary process, installed the conditions for the split between the JCP and the Rōnō faction (particularly Yamakawa Hitoshi and Inomata Tsunao). But in its ‘32 Thesis, the Comintern position reinforced this line even further in parallel to the world situation, by calling for a mass-based bourgeois democratic revolution against absolutism and feudalism concretized in the form of the

Emperor-system (*tennōsei*).⁵ The primary authorial and conceptual influence on this period of Comintern policy on the “national question” was Otto Kuusinen, who, in the 12th Plenum of the Comintern in this same year, called in general for mass-based actions which subordinated communist demands to the immediate needs of the broad mass front. By arguing that a directly communist political platform would alienate and keep the party separate from the rural poor and the “non-advanced” strata of the working class, this call essentially began the transition in the Comintern to the line of the popular front adopted a few years later in 1935.

In Japan, the Kōza faction’s position and dominance of this debate was comprehensively established with the publication of their 8-volume *Lectures on the History of the Development of Japanese Capitalism* (*Nihon shihonshugi hattatsushi kōza*) in 1932.⁶ The works in this volume were in preparation well before the publication of the ‘32 Thesis, and therefore should be seen not as an expansion of the position of this Thesis, but rather as preparing the ground for the hegemony of its position in the wake of the ‘27 Thesis. Noro Eitarō, a leader of the JCP, who was arrested and died in prison two years later in 1934, oversaw the compilation of the *Lectures*. Noro could be seen as the one who most concretely laid the groundwork for the overall conceptions of the Kōza faction. For him, the only way to truly and effectively articulate the political consequence of theory, the proletarian strategy, was to focus on the “particularity” (*tokushusei*) of Japanese capitalist development. The reason for this, Noro claimed, was that, without understanding the “dominated” (*hishihaiteki*) mode of production (i.e., the agrarian semi-feudal structure of the countryside), one could not understand the particular way in which

⁵ See *Kominterun: Nihon ni kan suru teze-shū* (Tokyo: Aoki Shoten, 1961).

⁶ Noro Eitarō, ed. *Nihon shihonshugi hattatsu-shi kōza*, 8 vols. (Iwanami Shoten, 1932-33).

the development of the productive forces had necessitated a turn to imperialism. This basic logic could be understood as the backbone of the position staked out throughout the volumes of the *Lectures*.⁷

Outside Japan, on March 2nd 1932, at a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Comintern, Kuusinen, then the leader of its Eastern Bureau, and charged with preparing analyses of revolutionary conditions in East Asia, made a presentation on Japanese imperialism and the nature of the Japanese revolution, in which he argued that the Communist Party of Japan, had at the time made errors in its underestimation of the role of the imperial system and the struggle against feudalism.⁸ In this text, Kuusinen makes a number of decisive points, highly influential on but also influenced by certain existing positions within Marxist theory in Japan. Perhaps the most important formulation is as follows: “We observe the uninterrupted and limitless oppression of the peasantry, conditioned by the exceptionally powerful *remnants of feudalism (hōkensei no zansonbutsu)*. The Japanese village is for Japanese capitalism a colony contained within its own domestic limits (*Nihon shihonshugi ni totte jikoku naichi ni okeru shokuminchi de aru*).” He continues: “Japan’s bourgeois transformation remains remarkably incomplete (*ichijirushiku mikansei de ari*), remarkably inconclusive or non-determinate (*ichijirushiku hiketteiteki de ari*), and is in essence *partial and unfinished*

⁷ On this point, see Norō Eitarō’s earlier *Nihon shihonshugi hattatsu-shi*, 2 vols. (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1930).

⁸ Otto Kuusinen, “Nihon teikokushugi to Nihon kakumei no seishitsu: 1932 nen sangatsu futsuka no Kominterun shikkō i’inkai, jōnin i’inkai kaigi ni okeru dōshi Kūshinen no hōkoku” [Japanese imperialism and the characteristics of the Japanese revolution: Comrade Kuusinen’s presentation to the Executive Committee of the Comintern, Meeting of the Standing Committee on March 2, 1932] in *Kominterun: Nihon ni kan suru teze-shū* (Aoki Shoten, 1962), 102-119. For a general overview of this period of the Comintern’s international policy, see *The Communist International, 1919-1943: Documents*, vol. 3: 1929-1943, ed. Jane Degras (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960).

(*chūtohanpa*).”⁹ Precisely because of these features, he argues, Japanese capitalism is crippled or deformed.

There is therefore, in Kuusinen’s view, no option for Japanese capitalism to sustain itself except by militarist expansion outside of its own borders, and therefore a direct turn towards imperialism. But thus this gives a particular character to Japanese imperialism, what he calls Japan’s “militarist-feudal imperialism” (*gunjiteki hōkenteki teikokushugi*).¹⁰ He formalized this “militarist-feudal imperialism” based on three distinctive features: 1) the emperor-system (*tennōsei*); 2) the landlord-based system of private landed property (*jinushiteki tochi shiyū*); 3) monopoly capitalism (*dokusen shihonshugi*).¹¹

In May of the same year, 1932, the Western European Bureau of the Comintern released their decisive statement, “Theses on the Situation in Japan and the Tasks of the Japanese Communist Party”, the so-called ’32 Thesis mentioned above, based in large part on the analysis undertaken by Kuusinen in the March documents.¹² The ’32 Thesis is not a purely historical document; quite to the contrary. It is a document of revolutionary strategy, and tactical considerations in the immediate situation. By focusing on the nature of Japanese capitalism, the Comintern highlighted precisely Kuusinen’s “three features” above: they focused on the emperor-system, not only as a “feudal remnant,” but as the living and institutional concretization of Japanese imperialism, the thing that linked together both external plunder and internal oppression.

In the environment of the ’27 and ’32 theses emerged a number of important

⁹ Kuusinen, “Nihon teikokushugi to Nihon kakumei no seishitsu,” 104.

¹⁰ Kuusinen, “Nihon teikokushugi to Nihon kakumei no seishitsu,” 107.

¹¹ Kuusinen, “Nihon teikokushugi to Nihon kakumei no seishitsu,” 114.

¹² “Nihon ni okeru jōsei to Nihon kyōsantō no ninmu ni kan suru teze” in *Kominterun: Nihon ni kan suru teze-shū* (Tokyo: Aoki Shoten, 1962), 76-101.

historians on this question, chief among them Hattori Shisō and Hani Gorō. Hani, whose most influential work of this time centered around the explication of the Asiatic mode of production in relation to the development of capitalism in East Asia, produced a complementary historiography. In his famous “The Formation of Capitalism in East Asia” (*Tōyō ni okeru shihonshugi no keisei*) – his main contribution to the original 8-volume *Nihon shihonshugi hattatsushi kōza* – he investigated what was, in his view, the tendency all throughout the East Asia towards stagnation and underdevelopment, except where Western imperialism had broken the early feudal situation.¹³ For Hani, the “Asiatic” element in the “Asiatic mode of production” could be characterized, above all else, as “essentially a slave or serf-system mode of production.”¹⁴

Immediately, we should note two things here: the first is the conflation of “slave” society and “serfdom,” a conflation characteristic of Hani’s analysis, insofar as it lumps together both the ancient and the recent past in a generalized concept of “pre-capitalism” (here we should recall that for Marx, and especially for the later “official” Soviet historiography, “slave society” was essentially synonymous with the Roman Empire, while “serfdom” characterized the lower peasantry in the medieval and feudal order); the second thing to note here in this short formulation of Hani’s is that the concept of the “Asiatic mode of production” is always deeply linked in his discourse to the idea of an empirical or actually-existing “Asia.”

Without entering deeply into this question, which is a vast field of inquiry on its own, it must be pointed out that what Marx referred to as the “Asiatic mode of production” had little to do with “Asia” as a transhistorical entity, or as an empirical

¹³ Hani Gorō, “Tōyō ni okeru shihonshugi no keisei” [1932] in *Meiji ishinshi kenkyū* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1956), 1-114.

¹⁴ Hani, “Tōyō ni okeru shihonshugi no keisei,” 43-44.

continent in the geological sense. Rather, it was an attempt to identify the specific features of the employment of surplus labor in the context of non-Roman pre-feudal social formations, generally characterized by a vast state apparatus directly serving as the authoritarian director of labor-intensive agricultural activities. Perhaps more importantly, however, is the fact that Marx gave up this term, ceasing to use it by the time of *Capital*, and generally refusing it in his later *Ethnological Notebooks*.¹⁵ Here we should more extensively examine Hani's understanding of the transition to capitalism in Japan.

He claims here that “our task is to understand the historical nature of Japanese society until the point at which it became ruled by capitalist relations of production based on an analysis of the pre-capitalistic relations of production tied to it.”¹⁶ It is on this point that Hani develops his own sort of schema for the transition to capitalism in “the East,” and he does this by means of a very specific analysis of dynamics of migration between the city and the countryside. According to his argument, the typical transition from feudalism in Europe consisted in a movement from the countryside to the cities – this new urban underclass would constitute the raw human material forming the proletarian class in the advent of early capitalism. But for Hani, the decisive point is that this never happened in East Asia – instead, when the old feudal order of the rural community began to disintegrate, people shifted in the expected mass exodus to the cities. But the cities

¹⁵ On the ethnological notebooks, see Kevin B. Anderson, *Marx at the Margins: On Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Non-Western Societies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010). I have commented elsewhere on certain methodological problems that arise in this work of Anderson's, but I believe it is in other respects, particularly in its archival research, an important and original contribution. See Gavin Walker, “Gendai shihonshugi ni okeru ‘minzoku mondai’ no kaiki: Posutokoroniaru kenkyū no aratana seijiteki dōkō” in *Shisō*, no. 1059, July 2012 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten), 122-147. On the “Asiatic mode of production,” see in particular Akademiai nauk SSSR, Institut vostokovedeniia, *Ajiateki seisan yoshiki ni tsuite*, trans. Hayakawa Jirō (Tokyo: Hakuyōsha, 1933) and Anne M. Bailey and Josep R. Llobera, *The Asiatic Mode of Production: Science and Politics* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981).

¹⁶ Hani, “Tōyō ni okeru shihonshugi no keisei,” 128.

themselves had little capitalist development, and no burgeoning industry needed this excess population, so people returned to their rural villages, now massively overpopulated and underemployed. As a result, rather than being the seed of proletarianization, they simply constituted an ultra-exploited human surplus.

Further, for Hani, in such conditions of total devastation and absolute deprivation, there is no possibility of political development – consciousness remains hopelessly backwards and feudal, because there is no modern political subjectivation through forms of work developing into the wage relation. According to this logic, Japan was definitely part of the “East” because it shared the quintessentially “Eastern” problem of overpopulation not in the cities, but in the rural village. The rural agricultural community, as the bedrock of absolutism, and the cornerstone of the low level of political development, was the decisive “feudal remnant” for Hani, and for the JCP as a whole. Hani, however, was a subtle and careful thinker who drew attention to the importance of always clarifying the characteristics of a given historical society. He continually points out (in a certain distance from Noro Eitarō) that overemphasizing certain “particularities” results in a subjectivism which will fail to grasp the specifically social character of capitalism, which is always located in the balance of forces obtaining within the relations of production. At the same time, for Hani, he wants to continuously return to the specifically “Asiatic” form of despotic dominance, which for him is a process of robbing the “people” (*minshū*) of their energy, their will to struggle, and it is this form of capitalist development, in which the “people” are always too late to the stage of history which essentially characterizes the Japanese situation.¹⁷ Despite Hani’s incisive emphasis on the need to always begin with the concrete relations of production which characterize

¹⁷ Hani, “Tōyō ni okeru shihonshugi no keisei,” 114.

a given formation, we see that here Japanese capitalism is essentially one enormous feudal remnant, one gigantic expression of “particularity” which apparently diverges or deviates from the “normal” track of development which is the logic of capital itself.

Hattori Shisō initiated a slightly divergent sub-debate within the struggle over the origins of capitalism, which later came to be known as the “manufactures debate”, staking out his position within the Kōza faction with two highly influential articles: “Revolution or Counter-Revolution in the Meiji Restoration” and “Problems of Method in the History of the Restoration.”¹⁸ The basic position with which Hattori theorized the Restoration was that it constituted not a simple bourgeois revolution, but rather a process through which the hegemonic social relations under feudalism began to crumble, a period of transition away from a purely feudal state form to the final form of feudalism, what he called “the absolutist monarchy”. In other words, the political consequences of this argument lay in the notion that while aspects of the bourgeois revolution had been set in motion, they remained (in the 1930s) unaccomplished and unfinished. The reason, for this, he argued, was the fact that the reforms undertaken in the Meiji Restoration became simply an opportunity for reproducing the old feudal relations of exploitation characteristic of the former feudal system of landholding *within* the newly emerging social relations, based on modern land-ownership, between the landlord and the tenant farmer. Thus, he sought clarification of the earlier processes of economic development latent in the Bakumatsu period, and the examination of the first signs of the emerging laws of capitalism.

Fundamentally, he argued, it was precisely the internal development of the seeds

¹⁸ Hattori Shisō, “Meiji ishin no kakumei oyobi han-kakumei” in *Hattori Shisō zenshū*, vol. 3, (Tokyo: Fukumura Shuppan, 1973), 179-256; Hattori, “Ishinshi hōhōjō no shomondai” in *Hattori Shisō zenshū*, vol. 4 (Tokyo: Fukumura Shuppan, 1973), 13-116.

of capitalist development *prior* to the “opening” of the country that accounted for the social and political upheavals of the time, and therefore he located the motor-force of Japanese capitalism in its internal emergence. For Hattori, the basis of the form of Japanese capitalism could be seen in the period of the 1840s-1890s, and the development of a type of “manufacture” – that is, a period of early development of labor markets through an expanded division of labor in tasks (often handicrafts) but without a dramatic change in the technical basis of production. Hattori saw in this a “double ambivalence” – on the one hand, such an organization contains the specter of change (i.e., marketization, penetration of the space of work by a primitive form of capital, gradual transition towards the wage relation, and so on), while on the other hand it remains wedded to the various embodiments of feudal and absolutist social characteristics.

In between or independent of the two major positions in the debate (the Kōza, or official JCP line that Japanese capitalism was only partially modernized on top of a feudal basis; the Rōnō or left-opposition line that Japanese capitalism was in the process of revolutionizing all social relations, and that superstructural elements of the conjuncture were unimportant) emerged Uno Kōzō (1897-1977), who would go on to become one of the most dominant figures in Marxist theoretical research in Japan, and indeed one of the most famous thinkers of Marx’s value theory worldwide. Educated at Tokyo University, he left Japan to study abroad in Berlin from 1922-1924 (where he was accompanied by Sakisaka Itsurō, later the editor of the Kaizōsha edition of the Marx-Engels Collected Works and leader of the Japan Socialist Party in the postwar – incidentally, the so-called “Weimar hyperinflation” of this period meant that with the favorable exchange rate, the Japanese Ministry of Education stipends for overseas researchers and students in

Germany were worth a small fortune, and in an interesting historical irony, it was this proto-fascist government money that allowed Sakisaka and other Marxist students to collect the materials that would compose the Collected Works and other original Marxian sources). Uno returned to Japan in 1924 (incidentally, on the same boat as early JCP leader Fukumoto Kazuo),¹⁹ where he began to teach, first at Tohoku University until 1938, when he was arrested on suspicion of his political stance. From this moment until the end of the war, Uno was forced to remain outside academic life, working in the statistics bureau of the Japanese External Trade Organization, followed by the Economic Research Institute of the Mitsubishi *zaibatsu*. After the war, in 1946, he was reappointed as full professor in the department of economics at Tokyo University, and immediately released almost a decade of theoretical work that had been impossible to publish under the fascist system – *Theory of Value* (*Kachiron*, 1947), *Prolegomena to the Agrarian Question* (*Nōgyō mondai joron*, 1947), *Introduction to Capital* (*Shihonron nyūmon*, 1948), and the first series of articles that would later form his two-volume *Principles of Political Economy* (*Keizai genron*, 1950).

Uno is best known for his reschematization and reformulation of Marx's economic thought, exemplified by *Capital*, into a highly formalized, purified system designed to create a “scientific” political economy on par with the other social sciences coming to the fore in the immediate postwar period. The most basic distinguishing methodological feature of Uno's system, the theory of three levels of analysis or *sandankairon*, is a tripartite division of the practice of theory, and represents an effort to construct a general economic meta-epistemology capable of dealing with the primary

¹⁹ On this episode and on his time in Berlin, see Uno Kōzō, *Shihonron gojūnen* [Fifty years with *Capital*], vol. 1 (Tokyo: Hosei University Press, 1970), 184-252.

contradictions of not only the conjuncture of Japanese capitalism (and the constant debate within Japanese Marxism on its origins and development), but also the theoretical concerns internal to Marxian economics. Structurally, Uno proposes three levels of analysis: 1) the level of pure theory or “principles” (*genriron*), the logic of capital as a thought-experiment made rigorously theorizable by letting its self-reifying tendency “complete itself in theory,” 2) the level of the theory of stages (*dankairon*), wherein the logic of a pure capitalism encounters a historical situation and is changed, impeded, or bolstered, and 3) the level of analysis of the contemporary situation or conjuncture (*genjō bunseki*).

What this division accomplishes in its separation of a level of “pure theory” or “principles” is an attempt to draw closer to the possibility of a Marxist logic – Uno often emphasized the importance of understanding Lenin’s famous argument in the *Philosophical Notebooks* that “If Marx did not leave behind him a “*Logic*” (with a capital letter), he did leave the *logic* of *Capital*.”²⁰ By attempting to develop to the furthest extent possible the *Logic* inherent in *Capital*, Uno also exposed or ran up against the limits of this logic, the historical contamination that is always paradoxically included in the thought-experiment of a “purely capitalist society.” Although most work on Uno over the last fifty years has focused on his methodology in terms of the tripartite division of theoretical practice, I argue that the essence or truly critical moment in Uno’s work lies elsewhere, in a short phrase that he considered the “nucleus” or theoretical center of his work, one that is constantly returning in his writing to undermine the smooth or “pure” logic of *Capital*, or rather, one that expresses (*darstellt*) the logical problem for the dynamics of capitalism around the national question. On a worldwide level, analysis of

²⁰ V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, 4th Edition, vol. 38 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), 317.

Uno's work has almost always agreed on its supposedly "pure" character – that is, he is widely considered the most esoteric, purely theoretical, excessively formalistic and scholastic figure in the Marxian analysis of value, but I argue that this is not at all the case.²¹ Uno rather makes a kind of wager on the possibility of a certain excessive formalism as the only means available to us to "express" the abstraction of the circuit-process of capital, but he is always undercutting the purity of this circuit by drawing our attention to this one phrase that concentrates within it the density of politics. This is what Uno referred to as the "mantra" of *Capital* (*Shihonron no "nembutsu"*): "the impossibility of the commodification of labor power" (*rōdōryoku shōhinka no "muri"*).²² What he means by this simply, is that the starting-point of the systematic logic of political economy must always "presuppose" (*voraussetzen*) something purely irrational as the ground of the rationality of the historical process, which will then be "retrojected" back onto the moment of origin in order to once again "presuppose" it *as rational*. But this excessive moment that grounds the circuit of accumulation cannot exactly be accounted for itself. We must detour into it. I argue that rather than being merely symptomatic concepts of Uno's so-called "hyper-theoreticism", not only Uno's methodology of three levels of analysis, but also his emphasis on this "impossibility" (*muri*), are concepts that are produced out of a direct sublation of the political experience of the debate on

²¹ For a relatively recent reading, which although affirmative, tends to reproduce this image, see Jacques Bidet, "Kōzō Uno and His School: A Pure Theory of Capitalism," in *Critical Companion to Contemporary Marxism*, ed. Jacques Bidet and Stathis Kouvélakis (Leiden: Brill, 2006). Ōta Kazuhiro's recent chapter, "Uno Kōzō: Rōdōryoku shōhinka to sandankairon" (Uno Kōzō: The Commodification of Labor Power and Theory of Three Levels of Analysis) in Suzuki Nobuo, ed. *Nihon no keizai shisō*, vol. 2 [*Keizai shisō*, vol. 10] (Tokyo: Nihon keizai hyōronsha, 2009) unfortunately reproduces this point as well.

²² This term "*muri*" (無理) is in no way a technical term, but rather a commonplace and everyday expression in conversational Japanese. It can be used to indicate that something is impossible, improbable, unlikely, etc, as well as an injunction to not "overdo it" or "do something to excess," to "strain oneself," or "go over the top."

Japanese capitalism. Writing in 1950 and reflecting on the debate, Uno incisively summarizes the essential positions at stake:

To sketch it out roughly, in opposition to the Kōza position, which claimed that tenant farm rent (*kosakuryō*) was a feudal remnant institution, the Rōnō faction attempted to analyze the situation in strictly economic terms, arguing that even if it probably connoted a feudal holdover, it was something that could not avoid commodity-economic determinations in developing in tandem with capitalism. Let me expand in detail on this further: against the background of the landlords' emperor-centered political power, the Kōza faction argued that the high rate of on-the-spot demands for tenant farm rent was a type of extra-economic coercion (*keizaigai kyōsei*) which had continued from the feudal period. In opposition to this, the Rōnō faction claimed that the landlords were in a position that was only rendered capable of making such traditional claims for tenant farm rent precisely through the competition engendered by the excess population and land stemming from the late-developing nature of Japanese capitalism, and that it was instead the development of capitalism that had gradually altered those relations.²³

Consequently, Uno argued, “the analysis of Japanese capitalism was divided into two camps: one that placed the emphasis on general economic foundations [Rōnō], and one that placed the emphasis on the particular political situation [Kōza].”²⁴ We can see from this schematic overview that the two essential positions in question were both basically concerned with the relation of the specific (the national form and particular factors of development) and the general (the logic of capital and its laws of motion on a world scale). In general, this opposition took the form of a series of stances related to the question of “backwardness” – was Japan a “late-developing” nation, one that had “caught up,” or was it characterized by a historical trajectory of development which had permanently crippled its features? Uno’s tendential answer is that this debate puts into question not the specific political lines or strategies of how to treat the situation of Japanese capitalism, but rather shows us the politicality of theory itself, it shows us that

²³ Uno Kōzō, “Nihon shihonshugi ronsō to wa nani ka” [What is the Debate on Japanese Capitalism?] in *Uno Kōzō chosakushū* [Collected Works of Uno Kōzō], supplemental volume (*bekkan*) (Iwanami Shoten, 1974), 13.

²⁴ Uno, “Nihon shihonshugi ronsō to wa nani ka,” 12.

“the question of how Marx’s analytical system in *Capital* could possibly be used in the analysis of such a conjunctural situation has still not been adequately clarified.”²⁵ What he means by this is simply to reject the question of “application” between theory and data as a whole. In other words, if *Capital* were to be treated as a blueprint for actually existing historical societies, nothing would be encountered in the world except for a mass of deviations. Therefore, Uno’s basic wager is two-fold: 1) to separate rigorously the three different enterprises of political economy – the pure theory of capital as an enclosed logical system, the periodicity of capital’s historical appearance on a world-scale, and the conjunctural analysis of specific situations – and 2) to reinsert a focus on the doubling of rationality and irrationality inherent to capital’s dynamics, as an oscillation between these levels. He locates this in exactly the “impossibility” (*muri*) that characterizes the labor power commodity.

While the form of labor power has been extensively theorized since the time of Marx’s work on *Capital*, it remains the central issue around three questions central to the entire history of Marxist theoretical research: 1) the relation between the logical system of capital and capital’s historical appearance; 2) the relation between the critique of political economy and the possibility of a political response to capitalist society; 3) the relation between the form of the nation or its particular expression of capitalist development and the systematic nature of capital which knows no such boundaries. I argue that in order to understand how the debate on Japanese capitalism could be treated as itself not merely one episode in a national or civilizational history that would make it some kind of “decent” and “comforting” story, but rather as a precious site of theoretical crystallizations that remain decisive by restoring the “danger” immanent in our time, we

²⁵ Uno, “Nihon shihonshugi ronsō to wa nani ka,” 14.

must approach Uno's work as a critical sublation of the debate. That is, behind the central theoretical moments in Uno's systematic unfolding of *Capital* lies not only a debate on the nature and characteristics of Japanese capitalism, but an entire theoretical and political continent of knowledge that we should re-discover: "This is precisely because I think that unless we purify the theory of principle latent in *Capital* to the extent that it can be utilized in the analysis of imperialism, and in relation to questions such as that of Japanese capitalism, it will be impossible to avoid lapsing into formalism, that a realization of effective cooperation between economics and research in other areas of social science and cultural knowledge will be impossible."²⁶

Prior to the debate on Japanese capitalism, Uno and Yamada Moritarō at one point worked together. Published as the eleventh volume of the *Complete Works of Economics (Keizaigaku zenshū)* in 1930 by Kaizōsha, Yamada and Uno intensively collaborated on the middle volume (*chū*) of *The System of Capital (Shihonron taikei)*. This text is composed of three segments: Part 1, "Capital's Transformation and its Cycle" (*Shihon no hentai to sono junkan*) and Part 2, "The Turnover of Capital" (*Shihon no kaiten*) both authored by Uno, and Part 3, "Prolegomena to the Schematic Analysis of the Reproduction Process" (*Saiseisan katei hyōshiki bunseki joron*) by Yamada.²⁷

What we have to notice immediately, therefore, is that the starting point of this joint research is Marx's work, but it was not the typical starting point of Volume 1 of *Capital*, with which we are familiar. Rather, it is Volume 2 and a divergent set of

²⁶ Uno, "Kyōkō no hitsuzensei wa ika ni shite ronshō sareru beki ka" in *UKC*, vol. 4 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1974), 144.

²⁷ Uno Kōzō and Yamada Moritarō, *Shihonron taikei (chū)*, vol. 11 of *Keizaigaku zenshū* (Tokyo: Kaizōsha, 1930). Uno's segments are reprinted in *Shihon no hentai to sono junkan* and *Shihon no kaiten* in *Uno Kōzō chosakushū*, vol. 5 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1973), 271-448. Yamada's segment is reprinted in *Yamada Moritarō chosakushū*, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1983).

concerns: the circulation process of capital, the turnover of capital, and the process of reproduction of the aggregate social capital. Therefore, we must consider *why* it is Volume 2 that allows Yamada and Uno to ground the starting point of their theoretical endeavors. I will therefore argue that only by means of a broad catachrestic reading of Volume 2 can we understand the dynamics that impel the development of Marxist theoretical inquiry in the Japanese context.

Volume 2, and the analysis of both economic and social reproduction, cycles around the fundamental question: could capitalism be eternal? Could this systematic and cyclical circuit-process go on in a permanent spiral? What this question in essence asks is a central and fundamental concern with the status of the subject in Marxist theory. In other words, if capitalism could indeed go on forever, then the particular character of the subject as developed in the history of Marxist philosophical inquiry, would be in jeopardy. Since the subject is already a doubling in the general Marxist text – torn between on the one hand, the subject as entirely determined or oversaturated by the structure, and on the other, as an evental, hazardous irruption that suspends the structure of its emergence – only a clarification of the basic determinations that underpin the question of capitalism’s eternality can give us a glimpse of the “scenario” within which such a subject comes into existence or is withheld from emergence. The paradox of volume 2 of *Capital* is exactly that it is in the analysis of capitalism’s capacity to reproduce itself *in spite of* its own inherent instabilities, ruptures, and gaps that we can also see an insight into how this paradox operates within the field of the national question also.

Thus, at the outset of the 1930s, the Japanese communist movement and Marxist

theoretical milieu was caught in the middle of an interpretive struggle in the Comintern. Like many other global sites whose directional coordinates in both theory and practice stemmed from their political connectivity to the international worker's movement, the Japanese environment was riven by debate on the central question: what is our revolutionary task? And further, in order to accomplish this revolutionary task, what is the essential nature of the situation in which we find ourselves?

As a function of this question, it is my contention that if we want to draw out central crucial *theoretical* issues from the debate on Japanese capitalism, we will find them specifically in the field of *history*. What I mean by this is not simply that we will see the historical “specificity” or “particularity” of the Japanese situation, and merely superimpose it onto various other given national situations in order to show its “difference.” Rather, what I mean is that because of the gap between the specific historical scenario outlined in Marx's work and the social-historical reality of the emergence, development, and directionality of Japanese capitalism, the Marxist theorists concerned with the clarification of Japanese capitalism were required to *create theoretical concepts* that allowed them to traverse this gap. This creativity in turn can be extracted from their works, and the concepts they created can be developed and utilized in new directions on a general level. But it should be emphasized that this point has not typically been acknowledged. On the one hand, although Marxist historiography in Japan from the 1920s through until the 1970s remained an exceptional field of work, both in the breadth and creativity of the research undertaken and the high theoretical level at which it was conducted compared to other sites, Marxist historical analysis, with few exceptions, remained largely separated from Marxist *philosophy*. In turn, the later analysis of Marxist

historical writing in Japan has often simply taken this split for granted, emphasizing that the object of analysis of most Marxist historiography in Japan was merely *Japanese development* (treating both the concept of “development” and its putatively “Japanese” character as *given*).²⁸ But this has had the effect of essentially obscuring the crucial role

²⁸ Here I must briefly address three essential works of intellectual history: Germaine A. Hoston’s *Marxism and the Crisis of Development in Prewar Japan*, Nagaoka Shinkichi’s *Nihon shihonshugi ronsō no gunzō*, and Andrew Barshay’s *The Social Sciences in Modern Japan*. I must state unequivocally that my investigation here is not in any way a critique of these texts: rather I attempt to work in a certain “division of labor” with them. That is, the questions undertaken here on the surface seem to concern certain of the same “objects of analysis” as these three texts: the debate on Japanese capitalism, the history of Marxist theory in Japan, the work of Uno Kozo, Yamada Moritaro, and others. But the “mode of operation” through which I approach these texts is quite different. What concerns me here is not to establish the genealogical or biographical background of the debate on Japanese capitalism, or its archival history in the sense of who did what when. All three of the aforementioned works give us an exceptional and detailed array of information on the question of the debate (through the 1920s) in relation to theories of development (Hoston), the intellectual exchanges and lives that intersected in the debate (Nagaoka), and the formation of the Marxist and modernist directions of the mainstream social sciences in Japan (Barshay). Rather, what I am interested in is to enter into the theoretical work within Marxist theory, historiography, and philosophy of this moment *as theory*, to re-read and re-write certain problems that emerge from the historical moment of the debate on Japanese capitalism not only within Japanese studies but from within the contemporary rethinking of historiography, the formation of the international world, postcolonial studies of capitalist dynamics, and new analyses of the epistemology of the social and human sciences. In this sense, I aim to think of “world Marxism” without the reliance on the conception of the givenness of the nation-state both methodologically (as a compositional or figurational element of contemporary analysis) and historically (as a field in flux within the debates on the national question itself). Hoston, Nagaoka, and Barshay, among others, have done an immense work – in all three cases, absolutely original and pathbreaking – a vast and crucial work of archaeology, unearthing and placing into the field of history a series of moments and sequences that reorient our conceptions of the world-scale of Marxist thought and its impact on the formation of the social and human sciences. But equally it must be said that this in no way constitutes a closure or end to the questions involved. Rather, thanks to their work, we must now *begin* an entire theoretical and historical project of rethinking the debate on Japanese capitalism *in theory*, that is, utilizing this vast field of knowledge not only as a field of raw data about the “other space,” but also as a repository of contestation, a repository of the congealed historicity of struggle through which knowledge on a world-scale has been constituted and reproduced. That is, the debate on Japanese capitalism, the formation of Marxist theory outside the putative unity of “the West,” and the theoretical content of these sequences of analysis, is not something that can be conclusively or finally determined simply by ordering it into a received history or by situating it within a “context.” Instead, we must start from the outset an endless labor of rethinking *theoretically* the content of *theory* itself by means of a new arrangement of intellectual history. In this sense, then, what follows will not be a reading that attempts to fill in gaps in the analyses of Hoston, Nagaoka, or Barshay (or indeed the many others who have touched on numerous aspects of this debate – and we should mention many people here, writing not only in English, but in French, German,

played by the debate on Japanese capitalism in a wide and diverse field of inquiries: literary and poetic texts, the arts, philosophical inquiry, social theory, and more. My basic contention and attempt in this text is that the *concepts* created within the debate on Japanese capitalism, and especially as they were *refracted* through the work of Uno Kōzō, can give us critical theoretical tools today, not only for a rethinking of Japanese intellectual history, but for numerous interventions in contemporary debates on the philosophy of history, in postcolonial historiography, and for contemporary political thought.

There are four main points on which the debate on Japanese capitalism concretizes in its form certain theoretical possibilities, possibilities that we will try to expand in the chapters that follow: 1) the analysis of the temporality of world capitalism and an accompanying rethinking of the period of primitive accumulation; 2) the relation between the production of subjectivity and the historical production of labor power as a commodity; 3) possibilities for the rethinking of the national question in Marx and Marxist thought and the rereading of nationalism in postwar Japanese thought in light of the above points; 4) the possibility of interventions in postcolonial studies, and particularly in relation to conceptions of “alternative modernity” in historiographical theory.

The Work of Form

The historical conditions of [capital's] existence are by no means *given* with the mere circulation of money and commodities. Capital only arises when the owner of the

Russian, Chinese, various languages of contemporary India, and of course, Japanese, where this debate has been powerfully developed in contemporary Marxist thought). Rather, it is an attempt to think of *what is at stake* in the debate on Japanese capitalism *for theoretical inquiry today*.

means of production and subsistence finds the free worker selling his own labor-power on the market. This one historical precondition comprises a world's history (*diese eine historische Bedingung umschließt eine Weltgeschichte*). Capital, therefore, ushers in from the outset (*von vornherein*) a new epoch in the process of social production.²⁹

- Marx

In the 1950s and early 60s, the international debate among Marxist theorists on the transition from feudalism to capitalism, principally between Maurice Dobb and Paul Sweezy, touched on numerous points critical to an understanding of the debate on Japanese capitalism. Takahashi Kōhachirō (1912-1982) was closely associated with the economic-historical work of Otsuka Hisao,³⁰ who was in turn deeply influenced by Yamada Moritarō, and particularly by Yamada's theoretical system, in which the figure of the transition, or more specifically, the *partial* transition, played a decisive role. Takahashi's 1952 "Contribution to the Debate" between Dobb and Sweezy, in which he strongly supported Dobb's position, written during a stay as an invited visiting professor in France, ends on an exceptionally important note for two reasons. First, he argues:

[The] revolutions in Western Europe, by the independence and the ascent of the petty commodity producers and their differentiation, set free from among them

²⁹ Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 in *MECW*, vol. 35 (New York: International Publishers, 1996), 180; Marx, *Das Kapital*, Bd. 1 in *MEW*, Bd. 23 (Berlin, Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED: Dietz Verlag), 184. Translation modified. The term "comprises" in the second to last sentence ("...umschließt eine Weltgeschichte") also indicates an "enveloping," "en-closing," or "en-compassing." This "topological" sense should be kept in mind.

³⁰ For reasons of space, I cannot develop here the relationship between Otsuka and Yamada, although I would like to take another opportunity to do so. Otsuka was profoundly influenced in his view of world history and comparative economic history by Yamada and specifically by the *Nihon shihonshugi bunseki*. On this point, see Otsuka's essay "Yamada riron to hikaku keizaishigaku" in *Tochi seidoshigaku*, no. 93, October 1981, 20-28. Many of Otsuka's other works, in particular, his discussions of world history in texts like his "Yoken no tame no sekaishi" and "Kindaiteki ningen ruiki no sōshutsu: Seijiteki shutai no minshūteki kiban no mondai" in *Otsuka Hisao chosakushū*, vol. 8 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1969), could also be revisited from this perspective.

the forces making – as it were *economically* – for the development of capitalist production; while in Prussia and Japan this ‘emancipation’ was carried out in the opposite sense. The organisation of feudal land property remained intact and the classes of free and independent peasants and middle-class burghers were undeveloped. The bourgeois ‘reforms’, like the *Bauernbefreiung* and the *Chiso-kaisei* (agrarian reforms in the Meiji Restoration), contain such contrary elements as the legal sanctioning of the position of the Junker’s land property and parasite land proprietorship of a semi-feudal character. *Since capitalism had to be erected on this kind of soil*, on a basis of fusion rather than conflict with absolutism, the formation of capitalism took place in the opposite way to Western Europe, predominantly as a process of transformation of putting-out merchant capital into industrial capital. The socio-economic conditions for the establishment of modern democracy were not present; on the contrary, capitalism had to make its way within an oligarchic system – the ‘organic’ social structure – designed to suppress bourgeois liberalism. Thus it was not the internal development itself of those societies that brought about the necessity of a ‘bourgeois’ revolution; the need for reforms rather came about as the result of external circumstances. It can be said that in connection with varying world and historical conditions the phase of establishing capitalism takes different basic lines: in Western Europe, Way No. I (producer → merchant), in Eastern Europe and Asia, Way No. II (merchant → manufacturer). There is a deep inner relationship between the agrarian question and industrial capital, which determines the characteristic structures of capitalism in the various countries.³¹

Secondly, to this long schematic summation of his argument, Takahashi appends the following note: “This problem was raised early in Japan: see Seitara [sic] Yamada’s original *Nihon shihon shugi bunseki* (*Analysis of Japanese Capitalism*), 1934, in particular, the preface which contains in compact form a multitude of historical insights.”³² Let us now take up Yamada Moritarō’s work and attempt to clarify this problem, particularly insofar as Takahashi reminds us as follows:

For our part, what the author of *Capital* wrote about his fatherland in 1867, in the preface to the first edition, still holds true, despite the different stage of world history: ‘Alongside the modern evils, a whole series of inherited evils oppress us, arising from the passive survival of antiquated modes of production, with their inevitable train of social and political anachronisms’. Thus the question of ‘two

³¹ Kōhachirō Takahashi, “A Contribution to the Debate” in Georges Lefebvre et al. *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1978), 96.

³² Takahashi, “A Contribution to the Debate” in Georges Lefebvre et al. *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism*, 96n.78. Yamada Moritarō’s given name is here erroneously rendered “Seitaro.”

ways', so far as we are concerned, is not merely of historical interest, but is connected with actual practical themes.³³

We will see quickly how Yamada's work in particular alerts us to a whole series of "practical themes" that remain central in contemporary theoretical discussions.

Yamada Moritarō was born in 1897 in Aichi prefecture, the eldest son of a local landlord. After studies at the Eighth Higher School, he graduated from Tokyo Imperial University in 1923, subsequently becoming a lecturer and then assistant professor in the Department of Economics. He was fired from this position in 1930, as a result of his sympathy for the outlawed Japan Communist Party, and was eventually arrested in 1937 during the so-called "Com-Academy" Incident. Thereafter it became impossible to continue openly pursuing Marxist research in the late 1930s, and after being appointed in 1939, Yamada went to the then-colonized China in 1940 as an economic researcher for the East Asia Research Institute (*Tōa Kenkyūjo*), a well-known think-tank for Japanese imperial policy.³⁴ After the war he returned to his professorship, and continued to be a leading figure of the Kōza faction.

The work for which he is best known, and which we are here concerned with is the 1934 *Analysis of Japanese Capitalism* (originally published in 1932 as part of the original 8-volume *Lectures*), a text which has to be considered one of the most simultaneously celebrated, reviled, frustrating, controversial, and influential works in the history of Japanese Marxist theory and historiography. Known for its forbidding, mantra-like phraseology and odd, highly abstract and individual diction, the *Analysis* is, aside

³³ Takahashi, "A Contribution to the Debate" in Georges Lefebvre et al. *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism*, 96-97. The internal quote from Marx is from the 1867 preface to the first German edition of *Capital*, vol. 1 in *MECW*, vol. 35 (New York: International Publishers, 1996).

³⁴ Nagaoka Shinkichi, *Nihon shihonshugi ronsō no gunzō* (Minerva Shobō, 1984), 271-275.

from its theoretical content, an intriguing site of literary politics. Widely known for the exceptional difficulties it posed to reading, the *Analysis* generated heated debate from the moment it emerged – importantly, it is not the case that the *Analysis* has simply become more cryptic due to shifts in language over the subsequent 70 years: at the time of its publication, Yamada’s text was considered incredibly difficult to understand, filled with “riddles” and “codes.”³⁵ Yamada himself later suggested that the stylistic choices involved in the *Analysis* stemmed not from a desire to “utilize expressions in such a way so as to be easy to understand,” but rather from a “strong desire to record the text in a correct form.”³⁶ In practice, however, the text is unique from a linguistic standpoint for its inversion of typical Japanese grammar, sentence structure and diction: many of the decisive terms of the text are rendered in a highly idiosyncratic and stylized manner, something which deeply attracted young sympathetic scholars, and enraged opponents with its aura of hermeticism and eclecticism.

In essence, Yamada’s goal was a description or image of Japanese capitalism as a type, form, or specific tendency, that is, the “structural features and principle forces governing its motion.”³⁷ Even within the orthodox Kōza faction, Yamada could perhaps be considered the orthodox fraction of this orthodox position. It was his analysis of the origins of Japanese capitalism, its features and trends, which formed the correlate to Nōrō Eitarō’s political explications of the “correct line” for the JCP in accordance with the Comintern’s position on Japan. The Comintern had declared in its 1922 thesis that Japan

³⁵ Terade Michio, *Yamada Moritarō: Marukusushugisha no shirarezaru sekai* (Nihon Keizai Hyōronsha, 2008), 75-76.

³⁶ See Yamada’s 1979 “Preface to the *bunko* edition,” reprinted in *Yamada Moritarō chosakushū*, vol. 2 (Iwanami Shoten, 1984), 6-7.

³⁷ See Sumiya Mikio and Taira Kōji, *An Outline of Japanese Economic History 1603-1940* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1979), 274-275.

was ready for socialist revolution; subsequently in 1927, this position was revised, although there had already been a strong split in the communist movement between Yamakawa Hitoshi's (later the elder statesman of the Rōnō faction) emphasis on uniting all left and progressive forces in Japan, and Fukumoto Kazuo's ultra-left emphasis on splitting over the correct line. In its 1932 Thesis, likely authored under the influence of Kuusinen's line, the Comintern declared explicitly that Japan was irredeemably backwards, that too many structural features of the *ancien regime* remained in the conjuncture for there to be effective socialist revolution.³⁸ Instead, what was required was a mass-democratic front against militarism, absolutism, the emperor-system, and incipient fascism to root out the remnants of feudalism. Only once such a political process had occurred could socialist revolution become for the first time a possibility in the situation – thus the Comintern demanded of the JCP a two-stage revolutionary process, one which subordinated socialist demands to Popular Front-style “democratic” ones. But on what basis did the Comintern demand this? The clarification of this question was the most decisive background to the Kōza position, exemplified by Yamada's *Analysis*.

A summation of Yamada's understanding in the *Analysis* of the development of Japanese capitalism and its semi-feudal nature could be described as follows:

³⁸ Here we should also mention that Kuusinen was the main author of the important Comintern paper “The Revolutionary Movement in the Colonies: Thesis on the Revolutionary Movement in the Colonies and Semi-Colonies, adopted by the Sixth World Congress of the Communist International, 1928,” (London: Dorrit Press, 1929), later reprinted in English in Italy by Feltrinelli (Milan, 1967). Here, the argument was particularly centered on the following point: “Everywhere, imperialism attempts to preserve and perpetuate all those pre-capitalist forms of exploiting (especially in the villages) which serve as the basis for the existence of its reactionary allies” (11). This text uses the terms “semi-feudal” and “semi-slave” regularly, and we should note therefore, that Yamada's peculiar vocabulary was not something particularly Japanese, but a reflection of a certain international discursive space.

While key industries were created under noneconomic coercion by the police-military state, the base of the economy remained feudalistic, composed of quasi-serfs tilling the soil under semi-feudal land tenure conditions and quasi-slaves forced to work in industry at appallingly low wages, lower even than those of India.³⁹

He essentially argued that the basic form of Japanese social and economic life could be articulated through the mantra-like formula of “militarist semi-serf system petty subsistence cultivation.” This type of analysis which emphasized the specificity of Japanese social organization had two immediate advantages: 1) it paid close attention to a major factor in the class logic of the Japanese social formation, namely the impoverishment and oppression of small farmers and the countryside as a whole, and therefore could be “confirmed” in its appearance on a vague notional basis by most activists and sympathizers; 2) it conformed to and articulated the historical and formative basis of the Comintern’s 1932 Thesis, and could thus be understood as the “correct line of analysis” buttressing the position of the international communist movement’s most official and respected body.⁴⁰

For Yamada, writing under the influence of the ’27 Thesis, the development of Japanese capitalism and its apparently “semi-feudal” nature could be cited as follows:

The process of establishment of industrial capital in Japan (1890s-1900s) was not something characterized by the development of free labor and the free competition of capital. Rather, it was formed through the interrelation between a semi-serf system of tribute collection (*han-reinōseiteki nengu chōshū*) and a semi-slave system of labor (*han-doreiseiteki rōeki*), which simultaneously enabled the establishment of industrial capital and the turn to imperialism. This is the basic determination (*kiso kitei*) that led to the process of the emergence and establishment of a semi-serf system, militarist form of finance capital (*han-nōdoseiteki gunjiteki kin’yū shihon*): the unified form of semi-serf system militarism and monopoly under the overwhelming role of the huge *zaibatsu* conglomerates, as well as the emergence of banking capital and industrial capital.

³⁹ Sumiya and Taira, *Outline of Japanese Economic History*, 275.

⁴⁰ See Makoto Itoh, *Value and Crisis: Essays on Marxian Economics in Japan* (Monthly Review: 1980), 22-26.

The formation of finance capital in its first stage was expressed by state ownership of railways before and after the Russo-Japanese war (1905), and the establishment of finance capital in its second stage was expressed in its full-fledged form particularly by the Law for Mobilization in Munitions Manufacturing (1919) during the World War.⁴¹

What distinguishes Yamada's work for the present analysis is the degree to which it identified (or rather produced and solidified) a naturalization and grounding of specific difference, which would "explain" the hierarchy of nation-states in global capitalist development. He articulated a fixation of "Japan" which placed it simultaneously directly within the system of international nation-states, but in a *permanent* subordinated position, one stemming from its "character," "style," or "form" (*kata*). This discourse, which was massively influential on historiography concerned with analyzing "that which is specifically Japanese" (*tokushuteki Nihonteki naru mono*), points not only to the broad problem of the enclosures as a process of formation and consolidation, but also to the general problem of origin itself. In the *Analysis*, Yamada summarizes this perspective as follows:

In the present work, in order to determine the process of the establishment of industrial capital, there is a crucial point on which emphasis must be placed. That is, the militarist, semi-serf (*gunjiteki han-nōdoseiteki*) form of Japanese capitalism as a system was finally determined just at the epochal moment of the 1890s-1900s (the 30s and 40s of the Meiji era), precisely during the period of the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese wars. Specifically, the process of the establishment of industrial capital in Japanese capitalism was due to these militarist, semi-serf characteristics, a process that at the same time enabled the turn towards imperialism, and the establishment of finance capital. It was in this capitalism which developed from its point of origin in the new reforms of the Meiji Restoration, that the Japanese form of the process of the establishment of industrial capital, as I have described it, was conclusively (*shūkyokuteki ni*) fixed and determined.⁴²

⁴¹ Yamada Moritarō, *Nihon shihonshugi bunseki* [The Analysis of Japanese Capitalism] in *Yamada Moritarō chosakushū* [Collected Works of Yamada Moritarō], vol. 2 (Iwanami Shoten, 1983), 141.

⁴² Yamada, *Nihon shihonshugi bunseki*, 3.

For Yamada, the decisive point that must be recognized is that the “specific (*tokushuteki*) and inverted (*tentōteki*) characteristics of Japanese capitalism are grounded in its inferior world-historical position.”⁴³ In Yamada’s understanding, this position is not a relative one, but a permanent one, precisely because of what he conceived of as the “stillborn” nature of Japanese capitalism, a moment of origin whose effects reverberate eternally throughout the Japanese social formation, and its tendencies towards militarism, over-exploitation stemming from the remnants of feudalism, authoritarianism, and low political consciousness. That is, he argued that the advent of Japanese capitalism was, unlike the origin of English capitalism, “not the cause for the extinction of the semi-serf, parasitic landlord relation, but conversely the cause for its permanent continuity (*eizoku*).”⁴⁴ But this type of analysis and its theory of origin is deeply problematic because it can resolve itself only in a constant logical recursion.

From the opposite factional position in the Rōnō group, Sakisaka Itsurō savagely criticized Yamada and his disciples again and again, criticizing “Yamada’s particularly pained style of writing” and viciously arguing that “it seems that Yamada ‘struggled for 10 years’ to produce this text, but on hearing this, and given its farcical reception, one simply has to call it a tragedy.”⁴⁵ He went further than sectarian insults, however, taking Yamada and his collaborators to task for what he saw as their static, non-dynamic, conception of the “eternal form” of Japanese capitalism, and by extension, the Japanese

⁴³ Yamada, *Nihon shihonshugi bunseki*, 5. Also see on this point Terade Michio’s recent biographical essay *Yamada Moritarō: Marukusushugisha no shirarezaru sekai* [Yamada Moritarō: A Marxist’s Unknown World] (Nihon Keizai Hyōronsha, 2008), 77-79. Terade’s text unpacks Yamada in an interesting, although idiosyncratic way, reading his literary politics in relation to Futurism.

⁴⁴ Yamada, *Nihon shihonshugi bunseki*, 152.

⁴⁵ Sakisaka Itsurō, “*Nihon shihonshugi bunseki ni okeru hōhōron*” [Methodology in The Analysis of Japanese Capitalism] in *Nihon shihonshugi no shomondai* [Problems of Japanese Capitalism] (Ōdoshā, 1948), 15.

social formation as a whole. Sakisaka makes the following argument vis-à-vis Yamada:

On the one hand, capital has apparently arrived at its process of establishment of finance capital, its “essential form,” and the “overwhelming role of the huge *zaibatsu* conglomerates, and the composition of banking capital and industrial capital” has emerged – thus, although thirty years of continual progress in the process of accumulation and concentration of capital have occurred, somehow the characteristics of landlords, peasants, and wage laborers had to remain exactly as they were in antiquity. The concentration of capital increases the number of wage laborers, and develops the proletariat both qualitatively and quantitatively. For Yamada however, capitalism's process of monopolization is something unidirectional which does not in turn develop the other various social relations. This methodology is precisely the inverse of Marxism. Perhaps feudal remnants never fully disappear in capitalist development. Perhaps on a certain level, and in certain situations, something like this “semi-feudalism” could exist. But such a sense of “semi-” is qualitatively different from that employed by Yamada and his clique.⁴⁶

Yamada in essence understood that the Tokugawa economic system was inadequately transformed from a purely feudal basis in property relations and laboring positions. He argued that the key industries in Japan in the 1920s were military in nature, munitions manufacturing and the like, and that their militarist nature was itself a direct product of the incomplete transition from feudalism, based on the fundamental and emblematic position of the peasantry as engaged in semi-serf agricultural petty subsistence cultivation. This peasantry would be drawn from a rural population of politically “semi-slave” wage laborers subjected to a brutal, semi-feudal regime of property relations characterized by semi-serf-system, parasitic landlords who continued to demand rent-in-kind even during the period of the formation of finance capital in the cities.

For Yamada, the Meiji Restoration of 1868 was in no way a transition from feudalism in the concrete sense, but nevertheless was absolutely essential for the development of Japanese capitalism, because it required the centralization and extensive arming of the Restoration government, which in turn lead to the “key industry” of

⁴⁶ Sakisaka, “*Nihon shihonshugi bunseki ni okeru hōhōron*,” 20.

Japanese finance capital, which was precisely military manufacturing. Thus “in the first place, domestically, military equipment was required to prevent resistance actions from the various strata of laborers, who were transformed from agricultural serfs into a semi-serf peasantry engaged in petty subsistence cultivation and semi-slave wage laborers through the reforms of the former Tokugawa feudal system of labor organization. In the second place, in terms of foreign affairs, military equipment was required not only to defend against invasion by the advanced capitalist countries, but also in order to force the market acquisition and seizure of steel in China and Korea. Thus in both of these senses, military equipping was a single supreme task. The rigid unity of the foundations of this militarist organization based on military equipment was guaranteed through the following two forms. First, the steel manufacturing plant, producing steel, the raw material for the munitions production of the weaponry forming the military and naval arsenals, the railroad as military transportation organ, the official plan for military organization and its realization, and so on. Second, the founding of the huge zaibatsu conglomerates which control the key industries needed for maximum possible mobilization, namely, mining, shipbuilding, and the machine industry.”⁴⁷

This is the basic framework of the *Analysis of Japanese Capitalism*: this “semi-feudal system of property ownership and semi-serf system of petty subsistence cultivation,” which is the “basic determination” of the “militarist semi-serf system” of Japanese capitalism, had, from the period of the establishment of industrial capital (1890s-1900s) up until the 1930s era of financialization, monopolization, and imperialism, been the unchanging “basis” upon which the Japanese form of capitalism emerged. Aikawa Haruki, a well-known Marxist thinker of the time, and disciple of

⁴⁷ Sakisaka, “*Nihon shihonshugi bunseki ni okeru hōhōron*,” 28.

Yamada, summed up this perspective: “capitalism has matured on the ground of the maintenance and preservation of landlord-based property relations, and thus had the form-characteristics of semi-serfdom engraved upon it – to preserve itself, capitalism arose within relations which eternally maintain this landlord system of property ownership.”⁴⁸

While Sakisaka’s own theoretical work has a distinct set of problems in its relatively mechanistic dialectic and schema of development, he quite correctly identifies Yamada’s problematic understanding of the process of enclosures as a unidirectional movement in which this apparently eternal and inverted social form “decides everything.” Importantly, Sakisaka points out the recursivity of Yamada’s understanding of the “essential form” – it is unclear what came first, the origin or its effects. In other words, if Japanese capitalism is *inherently* “backwards” or “semi-feudal,” was it the form of organization of the initial concentration of capital that produced this continuing set of effects as a unified “form,” or did the “form” pre-exist and subsequently structure the initial process of primitive accumulation? Obviously, if the accumulation process produced the form, it cannot be the original, all-effecting substratum which Yamada takes it to be, because it could not be eternal: the next shift in the concentration and trajectory of capitalist development would necessitate a new form, thereby destroying or subsuming the old “eternal form.” But if the “form” pre-existed the accumulation process and enclosures movement, how was capitalism able to alter social relations at all, which it must have done in order to develop the forms of wage, commodity, and basic industrial capital, if the blocks to revolutionizing and “freeing” the social positions were so insurmountable as to make “Japan” irreversibly “backwards?”

⁴⁸ Quoted in Sakisaka, “*Nihon shihonshugi bunseki ni okeru hōhōron*,” 32.

Thus we can see that Yamada's understanding of "form" or "tradition" as a block on capitalist development which can never be "overcome" (a position not dissimilar from many contemporary culturalist forms of "explanation"), is an (im)possible recursive circuit, one which reveals its own discursive form of capture. Yamada posits the unity of the origin as the basis of the problem, but can only demonstrate the unity of the "eternal form" set up *by this origin*, by recourse to a series of effects which occur only retroactively.

Sakisaka viciously criticized Yamada for this type of formulation, which tended to treat Japanese capitalism as a static, non-dynamic form which emerged at a particular stage through certain peculiar conditions, and that thereafter was essentially fixed. That is, Yamada's understanding of capital's "model", "pattern", "form" or "style" (*kata*) could be understood as a deeper level of fixity than that provided by capital itself, it was something like an underlying semi-cultural substratum that perverted, twisted, and hampered the "normal" process of capitalist development, "fixing" it as a frozen, permanent distortion. In other words, for Yamada, the whole of the Japanese social formation was essentially one enormous "feudal remnant".

Inscribed into the local motion of capital's circuit-process was this supposed Japanese peculiarity, creating a tense stasis: while capital's centripetal force would oscillate by gathering numerous effects towards its center, this "kata" would act as a countervailing centrifugal force, dispersing the capitalization of elements back to the feedback mechanisms of "semi-serfdom" and "semi-feudalism". Hence, for Yamada, in the final analysis, this "kata" was "finally" or "conclusively" (*shūkyokuteki ni*) determined because "the specific (*tokushuteki*) and inverted (*tentōteki*) characteristics of

Japanese capitalism are structurally (categorically and organizationally) grounded in its inferior world-historical position as a function of its formation process of industrial capital.”⁴⁹ But as Sakisaka incisively points out, the circularity of Yamada’s logic is the inverse of Marx’s own method. The mere existence of semi-feudal relations within capitalist development is not sufficient to argue that therefore the latter is subordinated to the former. Rather, the point is precisely that these feudal relations are themselves placed within the development of capital, and therefore they do not restrain capitalism as such. Even if such practices as frequent despotic on-the-spot demands for tenant rent by the local landlord occur in the same manner as they did under feudalism, the content of this act is completely different – as Marx remarked on the commodity form itself, it might appear the same, but “a new social soul has popped into its body.”⁵⁰ That is, these practices have been adapted to a completely new function within the network of social relations stemming from the development of the productive forces and relations of production. Therefore, as Sakisaka points out, in Yamada’s work, capitalism itself tends to lose its historical specificity and tends to be dispersed into a culturalist continuum of “form” or “style”. Although Sakisaka’s critique is an incisive and devastating attack on Yamada and his disciples, he nevertheless tends towards an idealism of the opposite variety: that is, for Sakisaka, even the historical production of “specificity” is meaningless, precisely because the advent of capitalism means that every “specificity” is already in the process of being dissolved, thus capital for Sakisaka is completely indifferent to “specificity”. Thus, he tends to place too much emphasis on the deterritorializing element of capitalist development, he tends to not see this movement as

⁴⁹ Yamada, *Nihon shihonshugi bunseki*, 4.

⁵⁰ Marx, *Capital*, vol.1 in *MECW*, vol. 35, 734.

a constant and interrupted cycle in which capital deploys itself in a complex and undulating process of relating to its own gradients of deployment, that capital's process of creating and forming specificities is part and parcel of capital's enclosure of the earth.

Sakisaka made precisely the critical point in his polemics against Yamada of the mid-1930s: "What one discovers in the investigation of specificity cannot simply be generality – rather we must focus precisely on the specificity of the realization process of generality itself (*ippansei jitsugen katei no tokushusei*)."⁵¹ In other words, the precondition of the movement of generality (the logic of capital) is contained in its deployment of enclosure; in order to recode the surface of the earth, it must retabulate the existing elements from a pure heterogeneous flux into specificities. Therefore, we must always analyze *the mutual complicity* between the general and the specific, which is illuminated for an instant in the moment of enclosure, in the continually renewed process of primitive accumulation as the impossible origin of order itself. It is precisely the generality of this stratum of *putative* specificity which is so crucial for us to analyze today, because focusing on the formation process of this stratum itself can allow us to generate new possibilities for thinking resistant histories past the dead-end of contemporary universalisms, which constantly and desperately try to recuperate the fantasy of "the West," as well as those contemporary particularisms, which always end up reinstalling a bearer of the historical process in the illusory concreteness of native "specificity" as a marker of legitimation. We should always understand that Yamada's type of explanation of "specificity" or "extra-economic coercion" as a block on development, as something which prevents full participation in the world, can never truly

⁵¹ Sakisaka, "Nihon shihonshugi bunseki ni okeru hōhōron" in *Nihon shihonshugi no shomondai*, 20.

demonstrate what this “specificity” consists in: Yamada in essence takes the apparently ancient substratum of Japanese cultural particularity as a “state hanging in the air,” something that, although divorced from conditions on the ground, nevertheless manages to “conclusively determine” the limits of the situation and mark the conjuncture with the sign of permanent backwardness. Yamada, and his type of explanation, must always mystify and project back into the putatively ancient past a typicality derived from a given set of conditions that “must have been there all along.” But in fact, it is exactly how capital itself operates, by retrospectively positing its own productions as its starting-point. The formation of specific difference by the continual reproduction of acts of enclosure shows us, however, that every situation wherein specificity stands in an apparent contradiction to capital’s global spread is in fact an outcome of social conditions, and not an inevitable result of an ancient grounding force of particularity.⁵²

Ōuchi Tsutomu compellingly summarizes the essential problem of the historicity of capital’s deployment in specific situations:

The Japanese peasantry’s existence is miserable, and the development of the productive forces is low precisely because these forces have their basis in the position of the petty farmer, which is located within the rapid development of Japanese capitalism. But what maintained the small peasant holding *as* a small peasant holding was not the feudalistic power of the landlord, that is, it was not a form of ‘extra-economic coercion’, but rather was precisely the structural character of Japanese capitalism itself. Thus, no matter how much the rural village tends to have a feudal hue (*hōkenteki na shikisai*), this does not indicate at all that the feudal system remains in the village, but simply that in order for the peasantry to be semi-self-sufficient, and to be made into the form of a semi-commodity-economic peasantry (*han shōhin keizaiteki na shōnō keitai*), something remained in the domains of thought, affect, or practices. *It was the management of this aspect through which the peasantry could be maintained as a ‘sacrifice that enabled Japanese capitalism to develop without resolving the problems it itself posited’*. Thus, however paradoxical it may seem, within the Japanese village,

⁵² In general on this point, see Engels’ “On Social Relations in Russia,” his response to P. Tkatchov’s “Offener Brief an Herrn Friedrich Engels” in *MECW*, vol. 24, 39-50.

what is feudal (*hōkenteki na mono*) is precisely capitalist.⁵³

We should thus always understand capitalism as something that is always aiming at its own systematization, that is, its own self-perfection. Historically, Marxist theorists have often understood development in terms of a simple and direct physical temporality: a continuum from nothing to full development along the axis of past, present, and future. Thereby, those spaces or capitals which were comparatively less systematized in terms of the overall articulation between the level of development of the productive forces and the relations corresponding to this level were largely considered “late,” “underdeveloped,” or “immature.” But it is important to emphasize that capital’s own internal desire for systematicity means that development always occurs within a “vector” or “directionality,”⁵⁴ that is, development is always “towards-systematicity,” it is never the opposite. Although we can clarify on the level of empirical history the existence of certain “late developing” capitalisms (Germany, Russia, Japan, etc) by way of comparison based on the unit of the nation-state, the fact is that their “lateness” is not itself a signifier of “backwardness,” or of being “late to the stage of history.” Rather, it shows that the process of enclosure which is necessary for the establishment of capitalist relations of production always takes place through the formation of a local specificity. The network of signification which attributes certain situations to the “present,” certain others to “backwardness,” and still others to “pre-modernity” and so forth, is a hierarchical network which is installed by the movement of enclosures, a movement which enables capital to realize its ambitions by localizing itself. Capital deploys itself in

⁵³ Ōuchi Tsutomu, *Nihon shihonshugi no nōgyō mondai*, 284. The brief quote within Ōuchi’s discussion is from Uno’s essay “Waga kuni nōson no hōkensei,” see note 46. Emphasis mine.

⁵⁴ See Uno, “Keizaigaku ni okeru ronshō to jissō” in *Uno Kōzō chosakushū*, vol. 4, 11-12.

a local gradient by attempting to ground and naturalize itself in a stratum of specificity, but this stratum is something that stems from capital's inner logic and not from the apparently "natural" local situation. In other words, "late" development itself simply means: capital's own internal "laws of motion" territorialize themselves differentially in relation to the local vector, through which capital must act "as if" it is a natural, internal production.⁵⁵

We should not think of the time of this directionality as the "past-present-future" of phenomenal or physical life, but as the time of capital's own self-movement, that is, an overall process in which phases and gradients occasionally come to the surface and then submerge throughout the endlessly spinning torus of capital which gathers and redeploys new elements throughout its spectral body. Because capital's own internal drive is always devoted to perfecting its systematic nature, capitalist development cannot be theoretically understood in a total manner by simply analyzing its emergence and historical process of maturation in a single "national" conjuncture. In other words, when capital emerges in a specific "national" gradient, it is extremely important to analyze its "specificity" in terms of its own tendency towards systematization, and not as if this "national" element is the kernel of resistance against capital's desire for full and total deployment (a desire that capital can never quite realize, but one that it takes as the basis of its self-unfolding). Rather, this "national" element is exactly the form of inter-national commensurability which emerges through enclosure, in tandem with capital's own emergence. This logical circuit is the one ignored by Yamada, because to open up inquiry to it would be to admit that we cannot reach the stage of unity without a prior decision – such a primordial

⁵⁵ Uno, "Shihonshugi no seiritsu to nōson bunkai no katei" [The Establishment of Capitalism and the Process of Disintegration of the Rural Village] in *Uno Kōzō chosakushū*, vol. 8, 41.

decision would be logically unthinkable from the assumed ground of the unitary “form” of the unity “Japan,” and therefore the original flux would be chaotic and not a putatively “natural” and stable presence.

Historicities of ‘Late Development’

Within the dominant positions of the debate on Japanese capitalism, virtually no-one examined Marx’s late writings on the development of capitalism in Russia, which his writing (as well as that of Engels) frequently dealt with in the decade after finishing *Capital*.⁵⁶ These writings have been extensively examined for their subtle and important treatment of the “national question,” writings which reveal Marx to be a creative, dynamic, and critical thinker who “refused to deduce social reality from his own books,”⁵⁷ who dramatically shifted the conclusions of his own methods of inquiry in the face of new situations. But perhaps the most interesting aspect of this material, and what makes it useful for us today, is that his writings on the Russian social formation circulate around the question of primitive accumulation and on the moment of enclosure in the general deployment of global capital. Classically, as is now well known, certain historical tendencies within Marxism bestowed on “Europe the burden of world-historical salvation by depicting a singular capitalism with an inbuilt progressive history spreading from Europe to non-Europe, which only secures itself through the systematic erasure of non-

⁵⁶ Actually, paradoxically it was Yamada who was interested in these writings from the very outset, but the broader points were not taken up at the center of any of these debates.

⁵⁷ Teodor Shanin, “Marxism and the Vernacular Revolutionary Traditions” in Teodor Shanin, ed. *Late Marx and the Russian Road: Marx and ‘The Peripheries of Capitalism’* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 275.

European (mapped onto noncapitalist) historical agency.”⁵⁸ But the way in which this was historically done within Marxist theory centers around the question of development: does every situation pass through the same set of events? Does, for instance, the Japanese social formation need to experience the transition to capitalism in the manner of the English countryside as depicted in *Capital*? In the debate on Japanese capitalism, therefore, the two positions tended to paradoxically link up in presuming, from two different directions, the iron-clad necessity of the English-style “becoming” of capital. For the Kōza faction, the Japanese rural village was simply a block on full development, a sign of irreparable backwardness and low political consciousness, an indication that the Japanese social formation was permanently crippled by its incapacity to realize the “correct” transition; for the Rōnō faction, the Japanese rural village is a form which is merely in the process of disintegrating on the way towards an “archetypal” process following the description of the origin of English capitalism, and its backwardness will be resolved by the inevitable transition to capitalism just as described in *Capital*.

But Marx’s late work, in particular on the Russian question, brings up numerous important points related to this question and to the conception of enclosure. Marx always emphasized, in addition to the internal logic of capital, the “historical interdependence of people and countries in the different periods of global history, i.e., the synchronic unity of

⁵⁸ John T. Chalcraft, “Pluralizing Capital, Challenging Eurocentrism: Towards Post-Marxist Historiography” in *Radical History Review*, no. 91 (Winter 2005), 32. Chalcraft’s article is an incisive analysis of the tendency in the history of Marxist historiography to erase the non-European trajectories of development. Nevertheless, I think that we can discover numerous Marxist orientations, many of them non-European, which do not fall into this tendency. Marx’s own late work, as I briefly touch on here, contains the potential for alternative readings in divergent directions as well. Moreover, this fundamental question turns also on the way in which capital itself is understood in relation to its vectors of deployment, the relation between the general movement of the logic of capital and the specific sites in which it territorializes itself, a question centered on the problem of enclosure and primitive accumulation.

history,”⁵⁹ that is, the inter-related way in which capital emerges as a global system, and not simply as one in which various “national” capitals follow in leaps from one situation to another. Rather, the apparently “uneven” (although it is merely one contiguous field from capital’s viewpoint) development of capitalism in relation to the nation-state should always be understood in intertwined terms. In beginning to study the Russian situation carefully, Marx was consistently confronted with the complexity of the nature of the Russian village commune (*obshchina*), its general milieu (*mir*), and the forms of craft labor cooperatives (*artel’*) that still existed, social phenomena which had no precedent in the Western European settings. Although many early Russian Marxists (in particular Plekhanov) essentially argued that these phenomena constituted blocks on the full development of capitalism, and therefore, blocks on the revolutionary process, Marx’s late work takes precisely the opposite perspective. The point is not that every situation develops in the same way, but that there is a certain contemporaneity which suffuses the world of capital, such that those forms which are apparently “remnants” of the previous order, in fact, simply exist in the here and now, and therefore are capable of a development without being simply destroyed. Thus, Marx insisted not on the native “specificity” of the Russian situation, but demonstrated carefully that capital itself always localizes its development as if it were a natural outgrowth of the situation. In other words, he drew attention to the fact that “enclosure” does not simply mean the English “Enclosures Act,” but rather the general zone of abstraction in which capitalism emerges.

Marx’s essential point regarding the Russian countryside is that if the village still exists in a semi-archaic form, the point is not that this village is therefore a “remnant” of

⁵⁹ See *Marks-Istorik*, ed. E. A. Zhelubovskaia (Moscow: Nauka, 1968), 431. Quoted in Shanin, *Late Marx and the Russian Road*, 18.

feudalism. On the contrary, the point is that this “archaic form” has developed into something totally different, a form in which none of the practices, positions, words, bodies, affect and so forth can be identified as “remnant.” Rather, it is part and parcel of capitalist development itself, inseparable from the here and now. “Late” development therefore does not mean “behind” or “lower.” It signifies simply that a different set of forms is developed to the highest point established by the total deployment of capital on a world scale, and that this development is contemporary, not something taking place in a different, backwards temporality. This is precisely why, in the well-known letters to Vera Zasulich, Marx points out that “the archaic or primary formation of our globe itself contains a series of layers from various ages, the one superimposed on the other. Similarly the archaic formation of society exhibits a series of different types, which mark a progression of epochs. The Russian rural commune [*obshchina*] belongs to *the most recent type in this chain*. For this very reason, it is therefore capable of broader development.”⁶⁰ He continues, “Its innate dualism admits of an alternative: either its property element will gain the upper hand over its collective element, or vice versa...it may become the *direct starting point* of the economic system towards which modern society is tending and may open a new chapter that does not begin with its own suicide.”⁶¹ The rural commune therefore, far from appearing to Marx as a “natural” stratum of irreparable backwardness, or the marker of a permanently “crippled” and “inverted” capitalism, had the historical potential to itself be the “fulcrum for social regeneration.”⁶² As Shanin points out, what is most interesting here is that Marx, in fact,

⁶⁰ Marx, “Second Draft of the Letter to Zasulich” in *MECW*, vol. 24, 363.

⁶¹ Marx, “Third Draft of the Letter to Zasulich” in *MECW*, vol. 24, 367-368.

⁶² Marx, “Letter to Vera Zasulich” in *MECW*, vol. 24, 371. On this point in general, also see Marx and Engels’ 1882 “Preface to the Second Russian Edition of the *Manifesto of the Communist*

argued that the Russian situation's course was "the precise reverse of primitive accumulation."⁶³ But I think we can also see here that for Marx, primitive accumulation, the movement of enclosure, was not merely the unilateral dispossession of the rural village in a single manner (that of the formation of English capitalism), but most importantly, the creation of a series of bordering-effects that could spark capital's deployment in a given situation, that would constitute the originary pre-condition for capital's movement.

Therefore, Marx gives an "economic" explanation for this historical element of the differences of enclosure depending on the situation. But his explanation is not an "economism" in the style of the Second International, he does not reduce everything to an inevitability or a European-style process, he simply understands that the level of the economic is something like the "differential virtuality" that Deleuze, for instance, took it to be. At the same time, Marx always resists the "extra-economic" explanation, precisely because it inevitably falls back into the mirror opposite of economism: the logic of the ancient cultural substratum which determines everything. Hence, Marx's discussion can be a way to chart an understanding of world capitalism against, on the one hand, the re-mobilization of a Eurocentric economic historiography, and on the other hand, a culturalist or nativist logic of "alternative modernity."

In this sense, it is interesting to note that Yamada's theoretical inquiry into the eternal "form" of Japanese capitalism always places the motor-force of history outside the economy, naming this "eternally backwards" element of the Japanese social

Party" in *MECW*, vol. 24, 425-426. See Bruno Bosteels discussion of Alvaro Garcia Linera's important reading of these texts of Marx on the Russian village commune in his *The Actuality of Communism* (London: Verso, 2011).

⁶³ Shanin, *Late Marx and the Russian Road*, 17.

formation “extra-economic coercion” (*keizaigai kyōsei*; *außerökonomischer Zwang*), or the exercise of an eternal feudal power. Ōuchi Tsutomu’s work on the agrarian question in Japanese capitalism extensively analyzed Yamada’s tendency to confuse this question as it relates to enclosure and the form of the Japanese village. He argues, that “obviously, on the level of economic history, feudal power was exercised at a certain point in order to dispossess the serf of his land (for example, the enclosures movement in England or the *Bauernlegen* in eastern Germany), but this signifies precisely the process of disintegration (*kaitai*) of the feudal system and the primitive accumulation of capital, not some originary ‘extra-economic coercion’.”⁶⁴ As Ōuchi points out, Yamada understands the “foundation” (*kitei*) of the social formation through the schematic formula “semi-feudal property relations = semi-serf system petty subsistence cultivation” (*han-hōkenteki tochi shoyū = han-reinō reisai kōsaku*) and locates Japanese capitalism as something essentially grafted on to the top of this stratum, thereby locating the motor force of social shifts in the unchanging agricultural stratum, not in the overall capitalist system.⁶⁵ This “structural character” however, is not at all the frozen and eternal “specificity” that Yamada theorized. Rather, it is exactly the specific structural features that are in motion in the becoming-general of a wide sequence of specificities, the formation process of

⁶⁴ Ōuchi Tsutomu, *Nihon shihonshugi no nōgyō mondai* [The Agrarian Question in Japanese Capitalism], revised edition (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1961), 102-103.

⁶⁵ See Ōuchi, *Nihon shihonshugi no nōgyō mondai*, 137-138n.133. On this point, it bears mentioning that Yamada’s logic of a capitalism unnaturally grafted “on top” of a stratum of unchanging backwardness is not an argument limited to the context of Marxist theory in Japan. Precisely the same argument was made by many figures in the world Marxist theoretical milieu, perhaps most famously by Stalin against Radek in the polemics of the 1920s surrounding the analysis of the Chinese social formation. See in particular Stalin’s “Talks with Students of the Sun Yat-Sen University” (1927) in *Works*, vol. 9 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1953), 243-245, wherein he essentially describes, contra Radek, Chinese merchant capital as something built on top of a permanent basis of “feudal-medieval methods of exploitation and oppression.”

specificity itself in capital's enclosure of the entire earth. In other words, Ōuchi's reading is not one which subordinates everything to economy, which says "all contradictions are resolved here." Rather, it demarcates how in a certain set of circumstances, we encounter the "economically given social period" [*ökonomisch gegebenen Gesellschaftsperiode*]⁶⁶ as if it were a type of specificity whose character is eternal. That is, capital is a social relation which always "gives itself" as if it were endless, as if it were grounded in the putatively "natural" elements it needs to legitimate itself. But in fact, the formation of these supposedly natural and ancient elements is part and parcel of how capital emerges onto the world stage through the enclosure into specific difference of a field of pure heterogeneities. This is why if we attribute some "eternal form" to a given specific "late-developing" capitalist situation in terms of "extra-economic coercion," it becomes impossible to clarify its material bases and historical trajectory. This is of course, not to "deny the existence of extra-economic coercion in the sense of the existence of forms of power which operative outside the sphere of economy." Rather, it is an attempt to "clarify the foundations of such a function of power" and its specificity. But it is never the case "that that this thing that functions outside the economy can be considered feudal, or that it can be conflated with the feudal social system,"⁶⁷ as a mark of backwardness, which is, in the final analysis, a simple denial of the "co-evalness" of the world as a whole.⁶⁸

This logic of the "extra-economic" in Yamada's discussion shows us precisely

⁶⁶ Karl Marx, "Marginal Notes on Adolph Wagner's *Lehrbuch der politischen Ökonomie*" in *Collected Works of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels*, vol. 24 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1989), 547, translation modified; "Randglossen zu Adolph Wagners *Lehrbuch der politischen Ökonomie*" in *Marx-Engels Werke*, Bd. 19 (Berlin: Dietz, 1962), 371.

⁶⁷ Uno, "Waga kuni nōson no hōkensei" [The Feudality of the Japanese Rural Village] in *Uno Kōzō chosakushū*, vol. 8, 64-65.

⁶⁸ See on this point Johannes Fabian's *Time and the Other* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

why there are many problems with locating the resistance to capital in something like the stratum of “culture,” in the substantiality of specific difference. The analysis of the enclosures, however, shows us precisely that this stratum cannot be equated to the ancient practices or ancient cultural stratum that cannot be captured. Instead, even if the practices are similar, the enclosures movement (taken as a very broad category of the formation of specific difference which enabled the world to become a world of nation-states) has ensured that these practices now connote something completely different, that they are now commensurable with capitalist development. In other words, capital is always *creating* the local, forming specificities, and organizing a systematic accumulation of differences. Thereafter, capital attempts to show that it is itself “indigenous,” that its functioning stems from its locality. But this is capital’s basic trick: to take those conditions that it itself posits and retroactively claim them as the necessary preconditions for its own full deployment. The enclosure of elements into regions of specific difference establishes a regime according to which difference is itself always mobilized for capital’s smooth functioning.

Although there are numerous necessary reading strategies of these texts that I cannot adequately cover here, I want to briefly inquire into this “remnant” structure of Japanese capitalism put forward in the various forms deployed by thinkers articulating the historiographical positions of the Kōza faction. Where does this discourse stem from? Certainly, this historical logic is by no means unique to the Japanese situation. Before these thinkers developed this question of the “feudal remnant” (*hōkenteki zanshi*; *hōkensei no zansonbutsu*), this question of the remnants or survivals of feudalism was a critical point of debate and contention within the international communist movement. It

was an essential problem that Marx considered in his late work of the 1870s, and a problem that characterized the discussions of Lenin and others on the development of capitalism in Russia.

Slightly later, in the mid-to-late 1920s, before Yamada and others theorized this specific structure of backwardness, the question of “feudal survivals” was the distinguishing feature of Stalin’s discussions of the prospects of the revolutionary movement in China, as well as the central point around which his line was distinguished from that of Radek, in a number of texts such as his 1927 “Talks with Students of the Sun Yat-Sen University.” The first question posed by the students to Stalin was precisely this one: was the Chinese social formation experiencing the transition to capitalism, the imperialist entry and capitalization of the existing social relation, or was something completely different occurring? Was Radek correct to emphasize the role of global capital in identifying the primary contradictions in the social formation, or was this the wrong site of analysis? This something different, the other site that they ask after, is the question of the “feudal remnants” (*ostatkov feodalizma*), the “remains”, “traces”, or continued existence of elements of the feudal system. Stalin’s reply is precisely that Radek’s mistake lies in underestimating these “traces”, that he consistently misunderstands how these traces – Stalin here uses a slightly different phrase, “feudal vestiges” or “relics” (*perezhitkov feodalizma*) – intersect with the encroachment of world imperialism into and in concert with the development of the roots of capitalism in China. That is, Stalin draws attention to the “specificity” of this situation, the particular hegemonic “combination” (*sochetaniia*) in which the ongoing development of merchant capital in the village co-exists with the “maintenance of feudal-medieval methods of

exploitation and oppression of the peasantry” (*sokhraneniï feodal’no-srednevekovykh metodov ekspluatatsii i ugneteniia krest’ianstva*). For Stalin, it is this specific “combination” that leads to the particularly “militarist” nature of capitalism in China, the fact that militarism and a whole series of feudal “survivals” therefore constitute a “superstructure” built onto the top of this “singularity” in China. Therefore, world imperialism and its process of development goes hand-in-hand with the continuance and strengthening of the whole of “the feudal-bureaucratic machine” (*feodal’no byurokraticheskuyu mashinu*).⁶⁹

Clearly, we should recognize that this conception of the problem is precisely the same as Yamada’s theoretical schematics. In other words, in a double movement, we cannot reduce the discourse of the feudal remnant to a theoretical “particularity” of the Japanese situation. In fact, the Kōza faction form of historiography and political economy is exactly the mainstream of the global communist movement of the 1920s and 1930s, as we have seen, for example, in the remarkable terminological consistency between Yamada, Kuusinen, Stalin, and others. It is not a logic, therefore, of the “particularity” of “Japan”, it is a logic of “particularity” in general. This point is extremely important, because it demonstrates that the Kōza faction’s intellectual position cannot be dismissed in an inversion of their own logic: we cannot simply say that they were obsessed with “Japanese-ness”. On the contrary, they exemplify a general tendency in Marxist historiography and political economy that locates a global project in a network of “particularities”, a project that was developed to an extremely high theoretical level in the Japanese intellectual world, and it is this broad, global logic that is the problem.

⁶⁹ J.V. Stalin, “Talks with Students of the Sun Yat-Sen University” (1927) in *Works*, vol. 9 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1953), 243-245; I.V. Stalin, *Sochineniia*, tom. 9 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1948), 66-67.

Thus, one of the essential “translational” problematics that we can see operating centrally within this debate on the emergence of capitalism is precisely the “translatability” of the conceptual sequence of these terms: singular, particular, specific, universal, general, etc. How does the “singular” – technically this is how we should understand the term as it is put forward in various translations as “peculiar conditions” – come to be conceptually translated as “particularity”, which in turn comes to be understood as that which impedes, restrains, or holds back the movement of capital? Actually, it is exactly the opposite. Capital deploys these forces of apparent “restraint”, and effects its own movement through its sequencing of these elements. In other words, capital is not a “conditionless” zone of expropriation; rather, it always exists as a telos in imbrication with an entire network of conditions which it itself deploys. Capital’s historical specificity can be found in precisely the fact that capital attempts to posit as its own grounding and internal presuppositions a series of things which it itself is not responsible for creating – but paradoxically, precisely by this attempt to posit these things as such, capital tries to conceal and erase this fact, in other words, capital is always recoding the surface of the social as an attempt to make its own presuppositions retroactively testify to its own necessity.

Marx’s own project does not endorse the logic of this massification of particularities in the least, but rather emphasizes that capital grafts itself divergently onto various singularities and re-computes them. Therefore, the “specific conditions” which obtain in a given space should be understood as “peculiar” in the sense of “singular” and not as “deviant” from something supposedly “central” or “normal”: capital names a relation in which it posits its own “deviances”. That is, capitalism is always mobilizing

the “particular” not in opposition to the “universal” but as part of the same movement: capitalism is always something like a “continuity in discontinuity”.⁷⁰ Therefore, the “world of particularities” envisaged in a global schema of various national “forms” of development and their temporal position can never be a “tool” for radical politics: this schematic is capital’s own blueprint for its expansion as a “continuity in discontinuity”.

In general, what is behind this series of problems? The question of the “feudal remnant” is not simply a way of talking about the rather obvious overlapping features of unevenness, asymmetricality, or contingency in the development of modernity – it goes without saying that such “feudal remnants” are always present in capitalist transition. Certain Marxist theoreticians, in particular Rosa Luxemburg, argued that primitive accumulation was not a period, as Marx described it, but rather an ongoing and endless process of violence against and expropriation of the exterior. But in the prewar Marxist discourse in the Japanese context (and in many other situations), the “feudal remnant” is understood first and foremost as a constraint, a material hindrance on “full” participation in the world as a schema. It is essentially a stand-in term for a remnant “ethnos,” “belonging” or “kinship relations” – in short, an understanding of the traces of *Gemeinschaft* overlapping the emergence of *Gesellschaft* – and functions primarily to outline an image of the national community, thereby “explaining” its position in the international order.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Ouchi Tsutomu, extending the work of Uno Kōzō, incisively points out that the most apparently feudal processes in rural exploitation were not paradoxically “holdovers” of feudal power or “restraints” on capital’s development, but rather structural elements of Japanese capitalism itself. That is, he shows clearly that “backwardness” is not something local or eternal; rather it is precisely that capital demands the formation of an overall schema of particularity in order to effect its own development. See Ouchi, *Nihon shihonshugi no nōgyō mondai*, 284.

⁷¹ In this sense both of the main trends of the debate on Japanese capitalism fall into the trap of imagining “community” as an accomplished fact in its full plenitude, in precisely the manner so

But as an analytic device and heuristic lever, the entire structure of the discourse of the feudal remnant is thus reliant on the givenness and naturality of the form of the nation-state. That is, the national form is presumed to be something whose characteristics were concretized and fixed in antiquity, forms that continue to overdetermine the historicity of capital's entry into the situation. But we must always confront the fact that, roughly speaking, the national community as a form is broadly co-emergent with capital's world deployment. In other words, the world as a systematic generality composed of a network of specificities (nation-states) is a schema which capitalist development has historically utilized in order to deploy itself (we should always understand this role of the ongoing and repeating formation and maintenance process of the nation-state in relation to Marx's discussion of primitive accumulation, the role of "enclosure"). Therefore, these thinkers like Yamada, Hani, Hattori, and the global Marxist theoretical culture of the time that they represent, are incapable of understanding the historical role played by the *formation* of the nation-state, the process by which capital then localizes itself in a certain gradient and uses its enclosure of that gradient to legitimate its own existence. In other words, their analyses are dependent on understanding the form of national specificity as a unity that pre-exists the modern advent of a particular, in this case Japanese, capitalism, the state juridical form, and so forth. But this logic hampers their analyses dramatically, it prevents them entirely from developing a more theoretically coherent understanding of the phenomenon of backwardness – that is, they see backwardness as a fixed, given form and not as an ongoing production. This problem has largely overdetermined the historical development of the Marxian understanding of the national form and its relation to the form of the

comprehensively criticised by Jean-Luc Nancy (see *The Inoperative Community*, 11).

colony.

Capitalist development, the way in which capital gathers its elements and deploys itself on a global scale, is always intimately related to its political and juridical antecedents in the form of structures of commodification and classification. These structures not only spurred on and necessitated both the development of the international state system and colonial expansion, but also and at the same time, the development of capitalism, which always works on a global scale (while nevertheless relying on the national border and colonial difference to effect its work). Therefore, it seems to me that a critical site of analysis, one that demonstrates the importance and cruciality of postcolonial studies, is precisely the analysis of the historical formation of “backwardness,” of the epistemological consequences of capital’s complex development as a “heterogeneity in homogeneity.” In fact, a great many of the prejudices, the forms of exclusion and inclusion that have historically structured the modern world, have been formed on the basis of this judgment of backwardness. Consequently, it seems to me that we must continually ask this question: Why did the internal emergence of the capitalist system require not only the transformation of immediate conditions to be suitable for the emergence of capital, but also require an expansion elsewhere and marking of territoriality with the inscription of difference? Therefore, it is my view that through the analysis of sites such as the astonishing depth and force of the theoretical legacy of Marxist theory in the Japanese case, wherein the “national question” was exposed to an unprecedented intensity of analysis, we can expand the potentiality of postcolonial studies as a critical force in the analysis of contemporary conditions of life.

The project of postcolonial studies has often put these judgments of

“backwardness” into question for their universalizing assumptions, their inherent Eurocentrism, and their patronizing logic whereby the incapacity of the “natives” to effectively revolt is grounded in a putative scientificity. If we push this tendency further, we can develop this broad problematic of why and how the colonial difference comes to be inscribed in the national itself, and how this process of inscription plays an essential role in capitalism. The Marxist theoretical slippage from “singular conditions” to “particularities” can be itself addressed by this potential of postcolonial studies, to analyze not “particularities” as if these exist in a substantial sense, but rather to analyze the historical production of “particularities” as part and parcel of the reproduction of the hierarchy of the world order around the “West and the Rest”.

I do not mean by this argument to diminish the political importance of the history of national liberation struggles, and the anti-colonial national movements.⁷² But it seems to me that the potential of the politicality of postcolonial studies also lies in this complementary site of analysis, one that can be creatively developed in order to account for a new situation of capitalist development and global security today, in which the nationalisms of the dominated have become compatible and useful effects for this global

⁷² In fact, it is my view that a more complex understanding of the national question, and its link to the theoretical problem of the production of national belonging, can lead us to a new appreciation of the importance for history and theory of the struggle for national liberation. I cannot extensively develop this point for reasons of topicality, but I would like to take another opportunity to do so elsewhere. Although I have many problems with James Blaut’s reworking of the national question in Marxist theory, and strongly disagree with aspects of his analysis, he makes an important point in emphasizing that the national liberation struggles should be directly considered to be class struggles: “Marxism does not reduce the national struggle to something which excludes the manifold dimensions of human culture; it conceives these latter *to be forms and arenas of class struggle*. Most critically, Marxism does not reach behind or under class struggle to find some other more basic force or phenomenon, something like an eternal ‘nation’, and ‘idea of the nation-state’, a ‘principle of nationalities’, a pseudo-biological principle of ‘territoriality’ or ‘aggression’, or the like, something supposedly autonomous from class struggle and more deeply rooted in ‘human nature’.” See James Blaut, *The National Question: Decolonising the Theory of Nationalism* (London: Zed Books, 1987), here page 24-25.

domination itself. In other words, if we merely valorize “local” nationalisms as a theoretical means of resisting the hegemony of “imperial” nationalism, we will miss the important problem seen in the debates within Marxist theory on the origins of capitalist development in Japan: if we merely take the “national” as a given natural stratum of existence, as a simple presupposition, we will be unable to identify the essential operation of how this “national” element is continually *reproduced* in tandem with the reproduction of capital on a global scale.

Hence, Naoki Sakai, for instance, has incisively emphasized that the identity of belonging to the nation-state always-already contains the irreversible time of the history of colonialism, and that therefore the postcolonial condition which we experience today is precisely the “present existence of the history of colonialism” contained within the form of national belonging.⁷³ Therefore, the “post” in postcolonial should be understood in precisely the way Marx described the “post-festum” nature of all social reason in capitalist society. That is, capital is a social relation that is always positing its own retrospective legitimation. Similarly, it is now, in the postcolonial present, that we truly see the end products of the form of the colony, of the techniques of ordering that were developed in colonialism. Capital’s own process of becoming is constantly showing us this effect in its own internal operation; in turn, it is Marx’s work and project that attempted most rigorously to expose and conceptually isolate the most elemental form of this imbrication or complicity. That is, capitalism itself operates by enclosing and capturing its outside, but it folds this outside back into itself as if it were an endogenous production. This describes of course, the process by which capitalist accumulation

⁷³ See Naoki Sakai, *Nihon/eizō/Beikoku: kyōkan no kyōdōtai to teikokuteki kokuminshugi* (Tokyo: Seidosha, 2007), 294-295.

operates as if it can produce labor inputs for the production process, when in fact, labor power is the one thing that capitalism cannot itself create (of course, the specific problem of “population” shows us that capital can create organs of itself capable of regulating labor power, but we will leave this analysis aside for now). But we might as well think of this theoretical structure as a general structure of power, one in which the “national question” can also be effectively understood. Certainly, I do not intend to thus claim that all situations are thus characterized by some moral equivalency or that there is a lack of ethical differentiation between various types of situations. Such judgments can only be made as active-practical relations to a given situation in a given moment. But what I want to point out here is that the legacy of colonialism, and the irreparable history of the colonial past, is a sedimented and irredeemable element of the form of the nation-state itself – we might even say that “colonization” can also be understood as the process of enclosure of the nation-state itself, the violent concatenation of elements into a putative national unity. That is, there can be no such thing as a nation-state which is not bound up to some degree with the colonial index of modernity – hence why Foucault continuously pointed out in his work of the late 1970s and early 80s that no state can avoid becoming involved in racism at some point. By this formulation, I do not mean that therefore power relations are irrelevant. On the contrary, the relations of power among and between nation-states remain a critical problem for politics and thought. But if today there is also something like postcoloniality as a general effect which conditions global life, it seems to me that this tells us something important about the historical and theoretical relation between colonialism and capitalist development taken as a whole. Indeed, it is this problem that requires us to formulate new ways of posing the “national question” to

account for this situation today.

The contemporary global order of the world, whose unit is the nation-state, is of course stratified and uneven. But capital itself can always account for this – in fact, capital names that social relation which relies precisely on folding its resistant exterior back into its own internal workings. That is, capital does not simply feed off its outside or difference – it encompasses the outside by making it appear and function as if it were posited by its own interior. Capital in essence may take various distorted “national” forms, but even when these forms are apparent deviations, it is accomplishing its own project. The historical presupposition for the becoming of capitalism is the existence of certain organized social forces that are capable of commodifying labor power, forces that are capable of ordering, dividing, and redeploying sequences that have been made commensurable with each other and with capitalist production. In order for capital to exist, there must have been a set of presuppositions that allowed and fostered its becoming. Many of these forms are guaranteed and secured by the state, by the way in which the state gives itself an image of the “nation,” which folds back on to itself and legitimates it. Every “distorted” or “particular” expression of a putatively “national” capital is an expression of the way in which capital has demanded its own deployment, and this deployment has always been intimately related to and reliant on the form of the colonial difference, the way specific difference is organized and inscribed in the state-division of the world. It is exactly on this point that the debate on Japanese capitalism can be a critical force, not only for the critical re-examination of the Marxist theoretical legacy, but also for the renewal of Marxist theory. That is, through this moment, we can take up the “national question” in a completely different manner from the way Marxist

theory has traditionally understood it, by emphasizing a return to the “relations of production,” not merely understood in a strictly “economic” way, but in terms of the relations and forces at work in the historico-epistemological “production” of “backwardness” and “national particularity” itself. Thus we can analyze the essential role played in the development of the contemporary state system, the continuing coloniality of power that characterizes the contemporary world, by the role of the historiographical “proving” of backwardness based on the concept “area.”

Elements of the National Question: Translation and Transition

When we imagine ‘the national question’, we generally think of a field of problems that presume or presuppose the givenness of the nation-form. That is, we often presuppose that the national question involves simply the excavation and categorization of the putatively “national” factors of development, the relative stage of a given national capital in relation to various other national capitals, the dynamics internal to a particular national formation’s reproduction, and so forth. In other words, the national question is typically posed as if the *national itself* is not a question, but rather an answer: the notion of *specificity* or *particularity* is frequently treated here as if it were something that explains, rather than something to be explained, a split between *explanans* and *explanandum* that has a long rhetorical history. But we might also say that the national question can be understood in precisely the opposite manner, an insight to which Etienne Balibar’s work has long alerted us, reminding us of the importance not just of the state, but of the “nation-form,” the term he gives to the aggregate of “apparatuses” and

“practices” that institute the individual as “*homo nationalis* from cradle to grave.”⁷⁴

It is relatively common to conceive of the nation as a form in which *belonging* is organized and to which the state responds. That is, the form of the nation-state is often understood in a common-sensical manner and by means of a simply sequence: the nation must precede the state, because it legitimates and justifies the state, it gives it a certain solidity that would otherwise be lost in attempting to link the state’s boundaries to a given community. But this sequence cannot be logically sustained for a number of reasons. First and foremost, if the nation were to precede the state, it would imply that a concept of *boundary* or *border* could be rigorously drawn between one nation and another prior to the advent of the modern *political* community. It would imply, for instance, that national language or custom could be strictly delimited or demarcated within boundaries that corresponded to concrete differences on the level of the *concept*. This in turn would imply that prior to such nations, there would exist a *natural stratum of difference*, in which difference could be understood as *already* organized. In this sense, it would imply that each national community was simply a historical concretization of a set of differences that existed not only in antiquity, but eternally, in an infinite regress, but always corresponding to some natural hierarchy that would be inscribed in the earth itself.

Needless to say, we know, and have known for centuries, that such a conception of an inherent systematic ordering of difference inscribed in the earth can never be said to have existed. Nations rise and fall, they are constituted and dispersed, the borders of languages fluctuate and mutate in historically complex waves, groupings emerge,

⁷⁴ Étienne Balibar, “The Nation Form” in *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (with Immanuel Wallerstein) (London: Verso, 1991), 93.

accidentally aggregated groups become ‘peoples’, migrate, resettle, colonize, are colonized, are eradicated or flourish. None of the communities that emerge from or submerge into the historical body of the earth have ever corresponded to a prior systematic *ordering of difference*, in which their divergences and continuities could be simply “proven” by reference to a given ‘natural’ stratum. This leads us, therefore, to assert the precise opposite of the commonly-held wisdom. In other words, it is that the state – a social form always associated with an *intensive* concentration of systems and institutions that in turn are made to correspond to an *extensive* territoriality and formation of borders – must always precede the nation. This would lead us quickly to another means of understanding why the nation-form is so critical to modernity in general, but also to two fundamental characteristics of modernity as we know it: its irreversible historical fact of imperialism and colonialism, and the fundamental basis of modern social relations in the form that we call “capital.”

If we tendentially accept a divergent ordering of the common wisdom of the formation of the nation-state as a building-block or unit of analysis through which the modern inter-national state system was formed and continues to be maintained, it remains to be clarified why this form of the nation should be *necessarily* produced. In thinking this problematic, there is, for instance, the famous line from Alfred Jarry’s *Ubu roi*, later utilized by Lacan: “Long live Poland, for without Poland there would be no Poles!”⁷⁵ This apparently cursory line in fact theoretically condenses the problem: at first glance, this statement has a certain uncanny functioning in its recalibration of the expected dynamic of relation between the nation-form and the national subject. It strikes us as

⁷⁵ This line is recalled at the outset of Joan Copjec, *Imagine There’s No Woman: Ethics and Sublimation* (Cambridge: MIT, 2002).

humorous precisely because it apparently implies its inverse – “There must be Poles first, so that they can constitute a Poland” – as a matter of course. But in fact we should read it in a quite faithful manner: the national people, as an extension of the *presupposed* national subject, is a production of the nation-form, itself a technology of belonging that is subsequent to the form of the state, and not the reverse. That is, the supposedly “concrete,” “obvious,” and “real” national subject is in fact always a derivation from the most abstract schema of modern life.⁷⁶

But behind this problem of the temporality or ordering of the genesis of the nation-form lies a more basic problem of the national question. Because the national question is essentially concerned with the specificity or particularity of a “given” national scenario, its peculiar developmental features and so forth, the national question is always linked to a specific field of historical concerns. That is, it is always linked to the question of the *transition*. The various debates on the transition to capitalism on a world-scale have long been at the center of the problem of the nation-form. Why and for what concrete material reasons should a certain national situation develop a particular arrangement of factors, a particular trajectory of the concentration of capital, particular expressions of social relations, particular “cultural” features or rituals, customs, linguistic specificities, and so on?

This type of question was typically answered by understanding the specific mixture of social factors that were present in the local elements that preceded a given

⁷⁶ Although I cannot take it up here for reasons of space, it would be necessary to take another occasion to develop this question in relation to the work of Nicos Poulantzas, in particular his final work, *State, Power, Socialism* (1978, Eng. trans. 1980). In relation to this work, Étienne Balibar has given us an exceptionally important set of reflections in his “Communisme et citoyenneté: Sur Nicos Poulantzas” in *La proposition de l'égaliberté: essais politiques 1989-2009*, Paris: PUF, 2010), 179-200, in particular his discussion of the specific form of the nation-state (185-188).

transition to capitalism. Was there a strong feudal social stratum, as in Western Europe, with its broadly developed seigneurial system and burgeoning urban centers? Was there a type of “absolutist” social system with an inverted form of overpopulation in the rural village rather than the city, as in the Russian or Japanese countryside? Was there a strong legal character to the transition, as in the English Enclosures Act and “Poor Laws,” both throwing the peasantry off the land and simultaneously criminalizing movement through the category of “vagabondage,” or as in the eastern German *Bauernlegen*, stripping land tenancy protections from small farmers and subordinating them to a vast estate system? And what about the profoundly colonial character of the transition to a world capitalist system throughout Africa, South and East Asia, and Latin America, wherein the growing global character of markets was from the very outset tied to the experience of slavery and imperial plunder of natural resources?

What we see in all these cases is that the transition to capitalism has always been tightly linked to the history of the formation and global ordering of putatively *national* communities. In this sense, the historical background of the transition to world capitalism, situated just behind the formation of the global and systematic arrangement of the world on the basis of the form of the nation-state, is always linked to the *production of national subjectivity*. That is, the nature and character of the national question, when investigated historically and theoretically, always reveals itself to be first and foremost a question of *how* this peculiar and generalized arrangement, in which territory, human beings, and social systems are articulated together into national units, came into existence in the first place. This question of *why* this particular arrangement should obtain, as opposed to the infinite variety of other possibilities of social organization, is involved

from its very origins with the production of individuals who would furnish, in their forms of citizenship, and above all, their supposed forms of subjectivity, the “raw materials” through which the nation-form could emerge, this “homo nationalis” that the social apparatuses of our modern world system essentially *presuppose*. This question is critical on the level of historiography, precisely because it can be a instructive direction from which to rethink the questions of “late development” and the relation between the general and the specific, between the logic of capital and the logic of the concrete situation, what Dipesh Chakrabarty calls, for instance, “History 1” and “History 2.”⁷⁷

Dipesh Chakrabarty’s influential *Provincializing Europe* has attempted to theorize this problem through an attempt to divide the question of history into two categories, what he calls History 1 and History 2. Chakrabarty theorizes “History 1” as the internal logic of capital itself, what he calls “a past posited by capital itself as its precondition.”⁷⁸ In other words, Chakrabarty understands this History 1 as the essential motor-force or dynamics of how capital founds and maintains its own narrative, the history that it tells to itself. For Chakrabarty, this is capital’s own “universal and necessary history,” the internal circuit which is never interrupted or concerned with the “local” but only with its own ceaseless, smooth circuit-process. On the other hand, he argues that there is also in Marx something which Chakrabarty calls “History 2,” those narratives and forms of history that “do not belong to capital’s life process,” things which, although they may contribute to the reproduction of capital, do not necessarily “lend themselves” to capital.

These “History 2s” are the central question for Chakrabarty, because for him they

⁷⁷ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), particularly 62-71.

⁷⁸ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 62-63.

“inhere in capital and yet interrupt and punctuate the run of capital’s own logic.”⁷⁹

Therefore History 1 must constantly attempt to destroy or subjugate these History 2s, which contain alien elements that cannot be digested or integrated into capital’s own smooth circuit-process. For Chakrabarty, this distinction is an attempt to get beyond the duality of “inside” and “outside” of capital, an attempt to deal with how difference itself can be accounted for despite the global totality of capitalist development. History 2, in this schema, is not simply the other of History 1, because for Chakrabarty, this creates a subordination of History 2 under History 1, effectively erasing that very “difference” which persists despite global capitalist domination. Instead, he argues, “History 2 is better thought of as a category charged with the function of constantly interrupting the totalizing thrusts of History 1.” That is, History 2 is an assemblage of pasts that, although subject to the domination of capital, are nevertheless sources of energy for the resistance of life to capital, sites of life practice and relation in which nothing is “automatically aligned with the logic of capital.” Chakrabarty therefore brings up the question of factory discipline, the role played by this form of control and domination, arguing that “the idea of History 2 suggests that even in the very abstract and abstracting space of the factory that capital creates, ways of being human will be acted out in manners that do not lend themselves to the reproduction of the logic of capital,” or History 1. This idea thus “allows us to make room for the politics of human belonging and diversity” amidst the totalizing force of capital’s own internal logic.⁸⁰

As a result, Chakrabarty argues that no historically-appearing form of capital ever constitutes a universal, but rather is always an assemblage composed out of a certain

⁷⁹ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 64.

⁸⁰ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 66-67.

balance of elements of History 1 and History 2, which are in a constant and cyclical relation of interrupting each other. Thus, he exhorts us to write history in ways that acknowledge and follow the intertwined problematics of History 1 and History 2, ways in which we might be able to grasp the “more affective narratives of human belonging” that are constantly interrupting capital’s smooth logic of progressive accumulation.⁸¹ In many ways, I agree with this project – it is one that certainly attempts to address and effectively dislocate the universal narrative of modernization that underpins much of the self-legitimizing writing which calls itself “history.” But to my mind the central problem with all such narratives (this schema of History 1 and History 2) and their political consequences is the inability to account for the specificity of the impossibility of the commodification of labor power. That is, Chakrabarty seems to believe that History 1 (the logic of capital) exists at a strong distance from History 2 (the multiple life-practices that do not inhere in capital), and that therefore resistance takes place within History 2, resistances that mobilize History 2’s internal tendency to “interrupt” or “punctuate” the logic of capital as a closed circuit. Chakrabarty insinuates that History 2 therefore, is essentially “difference” while History 1 is “homogeneity,” or “sameness.” Or to rephrase the political consequences of this (at risk of simplification), he implies that History 1 is the universal spread of global capital, a logic with its origins in a Western narrative of modernity, while History 2 names the subaltern, particular sites of incomplete capitalization, those sites whose “life-processes” are not necessarily countable by Western modernization.

But the problem with this logic is that therefore the “interruptive” or resistant function of History 2 comes to be located in a bounded past (all those sites that

⁸¹ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 69-71.

presumably do not “fully” embody the logic of capital) and in a bounded territorialized zone. The consequence of this is that in practice, such a logic can never get past the “inside/outside” dichotomy, because “resistance” is always placed entirely outside the network of power. That is, this theory cannot account for the problem of the impossibility, the point which grounds the entirety of capitalist accumulation and its spread, because it does not pay adequate attention to how capital’s logic relates to its outside. That is, labor power is an outside, but it is an outside which is always-already being folded back into the internal workings of capital and posited as a production of its own laws, so we must understand that capital paradoxically is always mobilizing something like “heterogeneity in homogeneity,” it is always mobilizing this external element of resistance as an essential building block of its own operation. This, for instance, is why Uno’s crucial emphasis on the relation of the impossibility of the commodification of labor power to the specificity of the law of population is an essential wager which parallel’s Foucault’s analysis of the role of biopower in the maintenance of the state.⁸² In Chakrabarty’s discussion, all power exists on the side of History 2, on the side of “specificity,” in its power of interruption, while History 1 only exists in order to be interrupted. But this cannot account for the way in which capital deploys the production of “specificities” themselves, that is, for capital, this “History 2” is not the resistant exterior which prevents History 1 from effecting its complete self-deployment, but something which always exists in a corollary, complementary, or complicit relation to it.

Today there are two broad positions deeply entrenched in the realm of contemporary theory: the “local,” “native,” or “particular” which legitimates the

⁸² This point is extensively taken up in chapters 3 and 4.

subtractive possibilities of certain situations (typically national or civilizational) to resist the hegemonizing and flattening effect of global capitalism – this can be seen in the various discourses of “alternative modernity,” return to the “non-aligned” political movements of decolonization, “resistant” forms of national development and so forth. On the other hand, there is the continual deployment of strong universalisms from a variety of vantage points. Such “universalist” positions place the emphasis on the fact that every expression of putatively “local” difference is already being mobilized within capital’s range, that capital can effectively compute these differences in its own internal calculus and that therefore, such particularisms can never resist capital’s total spread across the earth. But in my view, focusing on questions like the form of “enclosure” can allow us to bypass the dead-end produced in the encounter between these two positions. By emphasizing the moments of enclosure, when specificities are formed in order to effect the movement of the general, we can keep in sight the complicity generated between such particularisms and universalisms, the space of overlapping or bordering which makes these two “sides” appear. I would argue that the question of enclosure, the question of the very precise way in which the incommensurable is rendered commensurable by capitalist production demonstrates an analytical possibility outside of this double bind. This is precisely why the unresolved debate on Japanese capitalism is one of the sites par excellence in which to see what possibilities exist if we change the way we examine fields of problems like the national question from a divergent point of entry. It is in this sense, that we now must try to connect these points, formed out of the specificity of the debate on Japanese capitalism, back into the core of Marx’s work itself, and one of its most complex problems: the concept of the “so-called primitive accumulation.”

2. Primitive Accumulation, or The Logic of Origin

The function of the concept of origin, as in original sin, is to summarize in one word what has to not be thought in order to be able to think what one wants to think.¹

- Althusser

The original sin is at work everywhere (*die Erbsünde wirkt überall*).²

- Marx

In 1931, the young JCP leader and theorist Noro Eitarō answered an interviewer from the mass magazine *Sararīman* in the following manner:

Question: What are the reasons or motivations behind your current work?

Noro: Born as the child of one of the “openers” (*kaitakusha*) of the colonies, from a young age I grew up directly exposed on the one hand, to the essential dignity of labor, and on the other hand, to the “mechanism” or “device” (*karakuri*) of capital called “primitive accumulation” (*genshiteki chikuseki*), that is, to the inherent *irrationality* (*fugōri*) of the capitalist system.³

Noro's statement theoretically condenses and crystallizes a genealogical sequence of problems that we must address: the coloniality of the birth of capitalism, the specific mechanisms or devices that capital deploys in order to realize itself, and the rethinking of the process of primitive accumulation, which supplies us with the crucial moment around

¹ Louis Althusser, “From *Capital* to Marx’s Philosophy” in *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 1971), 63.

² Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 in *MECW*, vol. 35 (New York: International Publishers, 1996), 589; Marx, *Das Kapital*, Bd. 1 in *MEW*, Bd. 23 (Berlin, Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED: Dietz Verlag), 619.

³ Noro Eitarō, “Susumu beki michi,” interview originally published in *Sararīman*, January 1931; republished in *Noro Eitarō zenshū*, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Shin Nihon Shuppansha, 1994). My italics. The editors add here that when Noro mentions “the colonies” (*shokuminchi*), he is specifically referring to Hokkaidō.

which capital's *irrationality* can nevertheless function smoothly. In this sense, Noro effectively shows us the volatile contamination of logic and history that forms the basis of the capitalist system, a systematic expression of the (ir)rational birth or immaculate conception of capital, an improbable or excessive outcome of a contingent historical scenario that is recoded as the necessary order of events. Why is it necessary for us to address this question?

First and foremost, it must be said that the concept of primitive accumulation was not deeply taken up *as a concept* in the debate on Japanese capitalism. Rather, it was understood largely as a *given*. This is precisely why, as we saw in the previous chapter, Uno Kōzō argued that the debate itself was not really a debate to clarify the nature of Japanese capitalism, but rather a kind of indirect debate over the status of Marx's *Capital*. Could this schematic of the birth of capitalism, its maintenance, and logical trajectory, be simply “applied” to another scenario in which the basic terms and relations were composed in different arrangements? Could the fundamental relations of a capitalist society be generated without the precise image of the “doubly free wage labor” of the English countryside?

We have examined these questions from the vantage point of the national question, and from the vantage point of the transition from feudalism, but it is time to change our approach somewhat, and take Uno's argument at face value. In other words, it is time to return directly to Marx, taking in this specific history of the debate on Japanese capitalism, while trying to utilize the “facts” of this debate as a leverage to force Marx's work to open up to divergent theoretical possibilities. Secondly, it is the concept of primitive accumulation which links together two problems that are circulating together,

but not precisely in the same way, in the background of these questions. The two problems are the emergence of capital and the emergence of the nation-state in a given social formation. Historically, these two phenomena, crucial to our modern world schema, have been often theorized separately, or even treated as unconnected phenomena. It is entirely possible, and in fact has been the typical modality of analysis, to treat the national question in Marxist theory on the basis of the *givenness* of the nation. Alternatively, numerous studies of the transition to capitalism have been undertaken, in many cases generating important and original results, while nevertheless assuming the basic category of the nation-form, as if it were something geological or natural rather than something *political*. What I want to do therefore, with the basic mechanics of the debate on Japanese capitalism accounted for, is to now enter into a primarily theoretical discussion that aims to produce a different reading of the concept of primitive accumulation, with the goal of linking together these two problematics.

In his lecture “La solitude de Machiavel,” Althusser makes an exceptionally insightful remark about the force of Machiavelli’s thought, one that gives us an initial starting point for this chapter:

Machiavelli is perhaps one of the few witnesses to what I shall call *primitive political accumulation*, one of the few theoreticians of the beginnings of the national state. [...] In doing so, Machiavelli casts a harsh light on the beginnings of our era: that of bourgeois societies. He casts a harsh light too, by his very utopianism, by the simultaneously necessary and unthinkable hypothesis that the new state could begin anywhere, *on the aleatory character of the formation of national states*. For us they are drawn on the map, as if forever fixed in a destiny that always preceded them. For him, on the contrary, they are largely aleatory, their frontiers are not fixed, there have to be conquests, but how far? To the boundaries of languages or beyond? To the limits of their forces? We have forgotten all of this.⁴

⁴ Althusser, “Machiavelli’s Solitude” in *Machiavelli and Us*, trans. Gregory Elliot (London: Verso, 1999), 125-126.

To my knowledge, Althusser never in any of his later writings expanded on what precisely he meant by this enigmatic comparison, but he gives us the most decisive clue, a thread of inquiry that inhabits Marx and Machiavelli in common here. That is, the aleatory character, the aleatory historicity of the nation-state. In other words, Althusser does not draw a parallel between the so-called primitive accumulation and its political expression in a loose sense: he identifies these two moments through their aleatory nature.

I would like to once again emphasize that the form of the nation-state itself, and the question of primitive accumulation in capitalist development, are two sites in which the fundamental relation between capital's *logical topology* and its *historical cartography* express a relationship of torsion, which is in turn the moment in which the potentiality of politics glimmers for an instant. It is this cross-over between the logical interior of capital and the historical exterior of the nation-state that is critical in the process of primitive accumulation, the process by which an origin can be presumed precisely where an origin cannot be found, a process in which the historical occurrence is erased, or rather "disappears in the results." In short, we might say that *capital itself is the continuous logical space of which primitive accumulation is the historical incident or happening*, and by excavating all the implications of this formulation, we will try to use it as a divergent point of entry into the national question.⁵ In order to expand the theoretical analysis of this set of problems, problems profoundly situated in the history of the debate

⁵ In general on the question of the so-called primitive accumulation, I have benefited from numerous discussions and interventions, but I point out the following three in particular: Yutaka Nagahara, *Warera kashi aru mono tachi* (Tokyo: Seidosha, 2008); Jason Read, "Primitive Accumulation: The Aleatory Foundation of Capitalism" in *Rethinking Marxism* vol. 14, no. 2 (2002); Werner Bonefeld, "Primitive Accumulation and Capitalist Accumulation: Notes on Social Constitution and Expropriation" in *Science & Society*, Vol. 75, No. 3, July 2011.

on Japanese capitalism, we must now detour back to a fundamental inquiry into the “so-called primitive accumulation” itself.

The ‘Original Sin’ of Primitive Accumulation

This analysis of “primitive accumulation” begins from the eighth part of the first volume of *Capital* and takes up the final eight chapters of the text. This placement is not an accident – it is arguable that this analysis constitutes the decisive summation of the entire set of problems concentrated in this enigmatic social relation called “capital” itself, and thus important attention has been drawn precisely to Marx’s “method of presentation.”⁶ Equally important at the very outset of this analysis is noting that the object of inquiry is not “primitive accumulation” as such, but an analysis of “the *so-called* primitive accumulation.” For Marx, the problem originates from the fact that the analysis of the self-expansion of capital requires an endlessly regressive series of presuppositions: the movement of accumulation presupposes the existence of surplus value, surplus value presupposes that capitalist production is already established, the existence of capitalist production presupposes the existence of labor power which can be commodified, and the existence of this most fundamental thing for capitalism presupposes its *creation*. Thus he argues, “the whole movement seems to turn in a vicious circle” requiring that we assume what Adam Smith called the “previous accumulation,” one not resulting from capitalism’s established functioning, but one from which it itself begins to move. Thus, “primitive accumulation plays in political economy about the same

⁶ Jason Read, “Primitive accumulation: The aleatory foundation of capitalism” in *Rethinking Marxism* vol. 14, no. 2 (2002), 40.

part as original sin in theology.” But primitive accumulation does not indicate a break with a former “idyllic” age, rather it is “notorious that conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder, briefly, force, play the great part.”⁷

The peasantry, in being expropriated from the land, is “freed” in order to be reconstituted as the essential motor-force of capitalism itself: labor power as a commodity. Thus capitalism, in growing out of the previous mode of production, could only begin its functional circuit so long as the previous blocks (the village community, communal property, self-sufficient agricultural production for use-value, and so on) were removed as obstacles for the “free” development of communal owners into non-owners of anything but their labor power, and feudal semi-owners into private landholding owners of means of production, in particular, land. As he explains, money, commodities, the means of production, and so forth are not themselves capital, and cannot become capital without a process of transformation, and this transformation “can only take place under certain circumstances that center in this, viz., that two very different kinds of commodity possessors must come face to face and into contact.”⁸ I would like to develop this last point in a very specific direction in order to read the process of primitive accumulation as the process of the formation and capture of difference, the making-equivalent of difference in order to set in motion the circuit-process of not only capitalist development, but its corollary schema, the “international world” analyzed in depth by Schmitt. This problem is one of a general movement of “capture” or “enclosure”; the origin and maintenance of a system by which “encounters” themselves can be understood. In other words, what Marx describes here is not just a process of “freeing”

⁷ Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 in *MECW*, vol. 35 (New York: International Publishers, 1996), 704-705.

⁸ Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 in *MECW*, vol. 35 (New York: International Publishers, 1996), 705.

the peasantry to become the wage-labor required for the formation and rotation of the circuit of capitalist accumulation, it is also at the same time the inverse: it is the closure of heterogeneity – the simple and pure space of difference as such -- in order to produce *specific* differences, equivalences which can then “encounter” each other. This “face to face” encounter discussed by Marx is predicated on the possibility that the two parties in question can in fact encounter each other at all, a moment made possible only by the process of primitive accumulation understood as a process of the capturing, gathering and recombining of difference into units capable of a relation.

Marx analyzes in detail the process in the 15th and 16th centuries of the constitution of the “mass of free proletarians” who were “hurled on the labor market by the breaking-up of the bands of feudal retainers.”⁹ Through the usurpation of formerly commonly-held land, and by the forcible removal of the peasantry from its means of livelihood and community, the figure of the small farmer on a self-sufficient small feudal tenancy plot, which had been the basic social position occupied by the former peasantry, was eradicated, resulting in an enormous and unprecedented surge in the population of “free” laborers. Through laws forbidding the cultivation of plots, building of houses, or grazing of livestock unless performed on significant areas of self-owned land, the small farmer was subject to an insurmountable unified surge of force in the form not only of direct violence, but also through the indirect violences of the law in the form of subordination to the state. This “parliamentary form of robbery” came through the “Acts for the enclosure of Commons,” in other words, “decrees by which the landlords grant themselves the people’s land as private property, decrees of expropriation of the

⁹ Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 in *MECW*, vol. 35 (New York: International Publishers, 1996), 707.

people.”¹⁰ Through the massive wave of enclosures, direct acts of violence against the peasantry, and state intervention to ensure the smooth operation of the new formation of massive landholdings, by the “19th century, the very memory of the connection between the agricultural laborer and the communal property, had of course, vanished.”¹¹

As he stated later in his letters: “The chapter on primitive accumulation does not pretend to do more than trace the road by which in Western Europe the capitalist economic order emerged from the womb of the feudal economic order. It thus describes the historical movement [of the] divorcing of the producers from their means of production, transforming them into wage-workers, and the owners of the means of production into capitalists,” and traces therefore a certain “historical tendency of capitalist production.”¹² Marx reminds us in this text of his analysis of the Roman peasantry. There the peasantry was eventually expropriated from the land, divorced from their direct relationship to production, a process which resulted in the formation of large land-owners and large money capital. Consequently, this former peasant strata became reduced and dispossessed of all they possessed, except their labor power. But, these “Roman proletarians became no wage laborers but an idle ‘*Mob*’, more abject than the former ‘*Poor Whites*’ of the southern states of America; and alongside them developed a mode of production that was not capitalist but based on slavery.” Thus Marx incisively draws into relief the question of the mutual articulation between theory and history:

Thus, events strikingly analogous, but occurring in different historical milieux, led to quite disparate results. By studying each of these evolutions on its own, and

¹⁰ Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 in *MECW*, vol. 35 (New York: International Publishers, 1996), 714.

¹¹ Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 in *MECW*, vol. 35 (New York: International Publishers, 1996), 718.

¹² Marx, “Letter to *Otechestvenniye zapiski*” in *MECW*, vol. 24 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1989), 199-200.

then comparing them, one will easily discover the key to the phenomenon, but it will never be arrived at by employing the all-purpose formula of a general historico-philosophical theory whose supreme virtue consists in being supra-historical.¹³

Returning to *Capital*, he argues that later, the ultimate form in the British Isles of this process was the “clearances” of Scotland – the wholesale and literal removal of people from the land. But this process was accompanied by an interesting operation: the need to maintain or recombine prior social significations into markers of differentiation, forms of difference that were nevertheless compatible, digestible, and in a relation of equivalence (hierarchy being a form of equivalence, or at least commensurability). Therefore the “chiefs of the clans by no means gave up their time-honored trade as robbers; they only changed its form. On their own authority they transformed their nominal right into a right of private property, and as this brought them into collision with their clansmen, resolved to drive them out by open force.”¹⁴ This “reckless terrorism” was the real face of the “idyllic methods of primitive accumulation.”¹⁵

Of course, despite the massive delinking of the former peasantry from the land and the village community, industrialization itself proceeded at a slower pace, and thus the newly “freed” laborers were largely turned into “vagabonds,” beggars, criminals and so on. The “grim irony” pointed out by Marx is that this mass population, after being thrown off the land, and forced into nomadic existence, were criminalized for precisely what was done to them. The state demand placed on captured and tortured vagabonds and wanderers was that they “return to their birthplace or where they have lived the last three years to put themselves to labor,” but of course such “places” were precisely where such

¹³ Marx, “Letter to *Otechestvenniye zapiski*” in *MECW*, vol. 24 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1989), 200-201.

¹⁴ Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 in *MECW*, vol. 35 (New York: International Publishers, 1996), 718-719.

¹⁵ Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 in *MECW*, vol. 35 (New York: International Publishers, 1996), 723.

populations were expropriated from.¹⁶ This is the double-bind of the creation of the labor power commodity in the process of primitive accumulation. For Marx, the relative freedom of the former peasantry is an essential precondition of the formation of the capitalist mode of production, because the selling of labor power to the capitalist only becomes necessary with the formation of a labor market, whereby the laborer is “free” to sell to the highest bidder, without the extra-economic coercion characteristic of feudalism and other pre-capitalist modes of production. But this “freedom” is complicated by the question of necessity: for Marx, the laborer must be free to sell his or her labor power. Thus, the process of primitive accumulation and its enclosure, followed by the criminalization of vagabondage and wandering, was a process not of freeing in the strict sense, but paradoxically of freeing in order to more effectively “capture” and control the movement and circulation of individuals.

Without this control, which is concretized in the form of equivalence or commensurability given in the wage (and given by the labor power commodity), the fear is of the chaotic and exponential growth of uncaptured encounters, social confrontations unchecked and occurring without a previous established and ordering hierarchy.¹⁷ Hence, Sandro Mezzadra points out that the “fundamental theme” of Marx’s discussion of primitive accumulation at the end of volume one of *Capital*, is the “critical analysis of the process of political and juridical constitution of labor power as a commodity.”¹⁸ We have to pay close attention therefore, when Marx states that what he investigates is not so

¹⁶ Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 in *MECW*, vol. 35 (New York: International Publishers, 1996), 723-725.

¹⁷ The most comprehensive demonstration of this form of capture in the transition to the wage can be found in Yann Moulier Boutang, *De l’esclavage au salariat: économie historique du salariat* (Paris: PUF, 1998).

¹⁸ Sandro Mezzadra, *La condizione postcoloniale: Storia e politica nel presente globale* (Verona: Ombre Corte, 2008), 139.

much the actual-historical event of the genesis of capitalism, but the “historical presuppositions for its becoming,”¹⁹ because for Marx, primitive accumulation, the movement of enclosure, was not merely the unilateral dispossession of the rural village in a single manner (that of the formation of English capitalism), but most importantly, the creation of a series of effects that could spark capital’s deployment in a given situation, that would constitute the originary pre-condition for capital’s movement.²⁰

Marx unfolds the historical logic of the process of primitive accumulation by examining first the genesis of the farmer, the formation of domestic industry, and the genesis of the industrial capitalist. Domestic industry is largely formed through precisely the same mechanisms of capture in that it comes to replace the formerly self-sufficient cultivators, now transformed into wage laborers. Here Marx charts the existence of a certain material continuity between modes of production despite the enclosure and expropriation of the elements of the *ancien régime*: in giving the example of the flax-spinning industry, Marx points out that “the flax looks exactly as before. Not a fiber of it

¹⁹ Marx, *Economic Manuscripts of 1861-1863* in *MECW*, vol. 34 (New York: International Publishers, 1994), 247.

²⁰ In Marx’s late work of the 1870s, after the writing of *Capital*, he was consistently confronted with the complexity of the nature of the Russian village commune (*obshchina*), its general milieu (*mir*), and the forms of craft labor cooperatives (*artel*) that still existed, social phenomena which had no precedent in the Western European settings. However, Marx, in a series of well known documents (among others, the multiple drafts of the “Letter to Vera Zasulich,” the “Letter to *Otechestvenniye zapiski*,” and his “Preface to the Second Russian Edition of the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*” with Engels), did not take the line of many early Russian Marxists (in particular Plekhanov), who essentially argued that these phenomena constituted blocks on the full development of capitalism, and therefore, blocks on the revolutionary process. Marx’s point is not that every situation develops in the same way, but that there is a certain contemporaneity, not “sameness,” which suffuses the world of capital (capital’s “world of principle” or its own dream about itself). Thus, Marx insisted not on the native “specificity” of the Russian situation, but demonstrated carefully that capital always localizes its development as if it were a natural outgrowth of the situation. In other words, he drew attention to the fact that “enclosure” does not simply mean the English “Enclosures Act,” but rather the general zone of abstraction in which capitalism emerges and is maintained.

is changed, but a new social soul has popped into its body.”²¹ This “new social soul” signifies not only the existent commodity form; it signifies the recoding of the material basis of the former order with the inscriptions of the capitalist mode of production, a social order in which the commodity economy is the sole principle.

The (Im)possible Origin of Enclosure

Marx soon examines the other side of subjectivation implied by the process of primitive accumulation: the formation of the industrial capitalist. Here he makes the decisive shift characteristic of his analytic modality by demonstrating that the process of primitive accumulation is not a historical period lived at different stages in different sites, but an ideational determination of a total process of capture which cannot be directly correlated to a certain site, but which emerges as a generative flow in innumerable locations. In his style of grim sarcasm, he states:

The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of blackskins, signaled the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief moments of primitive accumulation.²²

What is decisive here in particular is his mention of Africa as a “warren,” in other words, a bounded, fenced, captured territory ideal for cultivation, breeding, and experimentation, in short, for reproduction. Here Marx points to the formation of “area” or “civilization” as a political technology of control, the effect of bordering (which can be understood as the ideational mapping of primitive accumulation on a global scale) whose primary function

²¹ Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 in *MECW*, vol. 35 (New York: International Publishers, 1996), 734.

²² Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 in *MECW*, vol. 35 (New York: International Publishers, 1996), 739.

is to constantly reproduce the naturalizing and grounding of difference in a phenomenal-material form, thereby legitimizing and sustaining it. This reproduction is essential, because while it is ostensibly intended to signal the reproduction of Africa itself, it is also simultaneously and unavoidably a figuration also of the “West,” as something differentiated from this “other” space. We can see in this process which forms and constructs the systematic order of “the West and the Rest,”²³ that the “secret” of primitive accumulation is not merely the historical process of the constitution of labor power as a commodity, but also a complementary or corollary process of drawing boundaries for stable – territorialized – identification. Therefore this element of capital’s drive to enclose, frame, and order the zones constituting blocks on the ceaseless expansion of accumulation (the Rest) also has the significance of a drive to fully inhabit, to truly become the West, to violently remove the blocks on a direct self-identity with no remainder.²⁴ In other words, “what capital does is that it attempts to create life worlds in

²³ On the discursive function of the West and the Rest or the ideology of so-called “civilizational difference,” a problem deeply related to Schmitt’s entire *oeuvre*, see, among Naoki Sakai’s many other writings, Sakai 1997, 117-152. Sakai’s crucial discussion of the operation of the “regime of translation” or “bordering” – the assemblage of effects that forces an act of translation, which is simply an act of articulation in the space of pure heterogeneity, to appear as an “encounter” between two already substantialized positions, rather than a primal zone wherein this split is itself created – deeply informs my analysis of the “formation of difference,” and is closely tied to Marx’s analysis of the process of primitive accumulation as the *Ur-Akt* of the creation of labor power which can be commodified.

²⁴ This use of the term “drive” should be clarified. “Drive” or *Trieb* can be understood here in Freud’s sense, as a force of pulsion that pushes something towards an object of satisfaction; it should not be confused with simple instinct (*Instinkt*). When I apply this term to capital, I mean that capital is a social relation in which the commodity economy is the only social principle. Therefore, the reproduction of capitalist society itself, the total reproduction of the society as a whole, must always pass through or be mediated by the form of the commodity. Capitalism therefore is always “driving” towards a pure commodity economy, one in which all social relations are purely commodified, although it never completely accomplishes this goal – in fact, it cannot accomplish this goal, because it requires something outside of its own circuit: labor power. Nevertheless, even if capitalism is never perfectly systematized according to its own ideal schematics, even if it can never reach its object of satisfaction (pure capitalism), capital possesses at all times a drive or directionality *towards* this systematicity. Uno Kōzō incisively formulates

its own image (like the factory) or to colonize existing ones, to put them to work for its own priorities and drives,”²⁵ that is, at this moment of the process of primitive accumulation, the existing social forms are not destroyed, but overwritten, recoded and redeployed with the “new social soul” mentioned above – hence, what begins with the advent of capitalism is not an apocalyptic cleansing and rebirth, but the advent of “a general semiology that overcodes the primitive semiotic systems.”²⁶ The first volume of *Capital*, and its analysis of primitive accumulation ends with the curious statement:

However, we are not concerned here with the conditions of the colonies. The only thing that interests us is the secret discovered in the new world by the political economy of the old world, and proclaimed on the house-tops: that the capitalist mode of production and accumulation, and therefore capitalist private property, have for their fundamental condition the annihilation of self-earned private property; in other words, the expropriation of the laborer.²⁷

Rhetorically, Marx denies that his analysis concerns the “conditions” of the colonies, rather it concerns the “secret” of the colonies. In my view, this is the critical point: that analyzing the “secret,” that is, the expropriation of the laborer as a process, is not merely a question of bringing to light the obvious violence and force exerted in order to effect it, that is, its “conditions.” It is more a question of how to understand the complex and subtle violence of *creation* in the “secret” of capitalist development. That is, this process of enclosure is not only the process of expropriation and dispossession, but also and at the same time, it is a process of the cataloging, diagramming, and fixing of singularities into a hierarchized system of classification that is made commensurable – capable of an

this point in Uno Kōzō, “Keizaigaku ni okeru ronshō to jishshō” in *Uno Kōzō chosakushū*, vol. 4 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1974), 5-25.

²⁵ Massimo De Angelis, *The Beginning of History: Value Struggles and Global Capital* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 139.

²⁶ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Mille plateaux* (Paris: Minuit, 1980), 555; *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. B. Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 444-445.

²⁷ Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 in *MECW*, vol. 35 (New York: International Publishers, 1996), 760-761.

“encounter” – but also unequal, hierarchized. Commensurability, that is, the possibility of an articulation between two things based on a shared or common measure, does not mean equivalence. It means that two things are “enclosed” in the same way, that through the emergence of “enclosure,” two things appear where there used to be simply contiguous planar space. This problem of enclosure, the space of tension that it exists in, is identified by Rosa Luxemburg in the following paradoxical formation: “Capital cannot accumulate without the aid of non-capitalist organizations, nor, on the other hand, can it tolerate their continued existence side-by-side with itself.”²⁸ But what specifically does this formulation mean for the question of primitive accumulation? Capital is always trying to flatten the earth, to eliminate all blocks on its smooth motion – for example, the form of “national difference.” Yet at the same time, Marx clearly emphasizes that capitalism is a social order in which it is “economic conditions” that “create conditions and differences among peoples independent of the ‘State’,”²⁹ and enclosure is the form through which these “conditions” and “differences” are installed.

In other words, capital is a social relation that deploys itself through a complex parallax with the creation of “the people” itself, the violent aggregation of people into “a people,” but this “people” often does not exactly play a role that assists capital. On the one hand, capital is incapable of effecting its operation of accumulation on a global scale without exploiting the form of the border, or civilizational difference. Yet at the same time, capital is constrained by these collateral creations, it is constantly running into a double bind: the world in which capital has territorialized itself, the world whose surface capital is trying to completely recode, is not the same as “the world of capital,” in which

²⁸ Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital* (London: Routledge, 2003), 345.

²⁹ Marx, “Preparatory Materials – Notes on Bakunin’s Book *Statehood and Anarchy*” in *MECW*, vol. 24 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1989), 507.

the accumulation cycle meets no challenges. But paradoxically, and capital's "secret" -- the "secret" of the "expropriation of the laborer" that Marx mentioned above -- is contained in this problem, capital *cannot* bridge this gap, because this gap or irresolvable tension is in fact what allows capital to discover "labor power," the raw material for all capitalist production, the one input that capital cannot itself directly create, and therefore the "law of population" that will allow capital to overcome this limitation without resolving it.

Therefore, this strange phenomenon called primitive accumulation, or the (im)possible origin of capital, in which we see the illogical-irrational origin of labor power as a commodity, shows us a densely interwoven knot of problems. By harnessing the flux of singularities into fields, areas, regions, in short, bounded spaces, the process of primitive accumulation can be seen as the quintessential but untraceable origin of modernity, a modernity whose constitutive feature of the transformation of empirical singularities into regions of commensurable difference is itself expressed in its ultimate form in the colonial laboratory of relations and the form of enclosure called the nation-state. Thus, the problem of primitive accumulation, understood in the sense undertaken here as a problem of the capture of empirical singularities and formation-process of hierarchized commensurability is not merely the problem of the exterior as such, but is strictly speaking the problem of *arkhē*, signifying both "commencement and commandment,"³⁰ the problem of the event of origin, but origin in the sense that while it gives foundation, it is also that which comes to control or order ("-archy"), in the form of presuming for itself a starting point which it itself founds.

³⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*, trans. E. Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

Holding ourselves in the unstable conceptual space of this problem is exactly what Derrida has long referred to elsewhere as the thought of *différance*. It is precisely what Althusser theorized in his understanding of the contingent encounter or event, the aleatory moment of “becoming-necessary” in primitive accumulation, in which “everything is accomplished in advance, the structure precedes its elements and reproduces them in order to reproduce the structure.”³¹ Thus we see that the problem of primitive accumulation is not first and foremost a historical or stage-theoretical problem, but rather one of the *logic* of origin itself. Nagahara Yutaka effectively articulates this problem in relation to the question of primitive accumulation when he states:

The specific “factual history” of the formation and emergence of English capitalism, an illogical historical contingency (or precedent), a non-cyclical material event (or accident) for the logical system of the so-called principles of political economy, is always-already being completed – even transformed – on the basis of the logic of capital, and this “first return to origins,” which sustains the integrating procedure of historical reduction as the “so-called primitive accumulation” or the “origin” of capital, can never be cut off from the cycle of logic itself [...].³²

In other words, the entire problem of primitive accumulation and the movement of enclosures is suffused by an impossible historicity. When we historicize this double process as a historical moment, and locate it in the specific empirical situation of the “becoming” of English capitalism, we are already within the logical circuit of capital’s self-deployment, not simply on a “purely” empirical level of the economic history of a

³¹ Louis Althusser, “Le courant souterrain du matérialisme de la rencontre” in *Écrits philosophiques et politiques*, tome 1 (Paris: Stock/IMEC, 1994), 574; “The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter” in *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978-1987*, trans. G.M. Goshgarian (London: Verso, 2006), 200.

³² Nagahara Yutaka, “Ronri no ronriteki rinkai: jissen e no ‘ronri’teki tsugite” [The logical limits of logic: ‘Logic’-al splittings towards practice] in *Shijō keizai no shinwa to sono henkaku: ‘Shakaiteki na koto’ no fukken* [Overturning the myth of the market economy: The restoration of the social] (Tokyo: Hōsei University Press, 2003), 67.

specific site. As soon as we historicize the process of enclosure, we are immediately thrown back on an impasse: is it the logic of capital as a conceptual field which presupposes enclosure as a specific moment, or does this logic already exist, and thereby give rise to this moment? That is, enclosure – or, the formation of specific difference out of the flux of pure heterogeneities – is a moment in the Hegelian sense, and not in the sense of linear temporality. Enclosure is a moment of singularity, an untraceable line of capture, a third term which permits the mutual recognition and complicity between the moments of the universal and the particular. Primitive accumulation is not simply the formation of particularities. It is the formation of a network of signification according to which phenomena can be computed within the framework of universal and particular. Thus, it is an irreparable moment of the modern condition, whose effects we are still living through. Paradoxically, primitive accumulation is something that we, who are already situated within a broad spectrum of social-historical institutions such as language itself, cannot, strictly speaking, approach without already presuming it. That is, we ourselves have always-already been “enclosed,” and therefore the historicization of enclosure throws us back on the very limit of historicity itself.

In other words, we can see in the analysis of the process of primitive accumulation that capital is always *creating* the local, forming specificities, and organizing a systematic accumulation of differences. Thereafter, capital attempts to show that it is itself “indigenous,” that its functioning stems from its locality. But this is capital’s basic trick: to take those conditions that it itself posits and retroactively claim them as the necessary preconditions for its own full deployment. Marx specifically recognized that primitive accumulation and its movement of enclosures, its fixing of an

order of differences, was not something that simply occurred once on the empirical level of the history of empirical events. Rather, Marx incisively pointed out that in capitalist society, which is never at rest, but rather a circuit in constant motion, we must recognize that the “original sin is at work everywhere” (*die Erbsünde wirkt überall*).³³

Nomos and the Fixing of Order

Sandro Mezzadra has devoted a chapter of his recent and important work to this matrix of questions, demanding a rereading in a new light of this section of *Capital*. He describes the process of primitive accumulation as an *Ursprung*, an origin or moment of genesis, which, “like a concave mirror, returns the image of the capitalist mode of production in its totality, by illuminating, like the ‘exception’ in Benjamin (much more than that of Schmitt), certain fundamental but hidden characteristics of the functioning of ‘normality’.”³⁴ This ‘normality’ was extensively addressed by Marx, in as much as the violence and force of primitive accumulation as a historical process is hidden or covered over by its originary or initial position in relation to the viewpoint of an already-established smoothly operating circular form of capitalist accumulation. But I would argue that Carl Schmitt remains critically important here (along with Benjamin) for a theorization of the moment of primitive accumulation. It is in fact Schmitt who has theorized the most decisive corollary analysis to that performed by Marx on the question

³³ Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 in *MECW*, vol. 35 (New York: International Publishers, 1996), 589; Marx, *Das Kapital*, Bd. 1 in *MEW*, Bd. 23 (Berlin, Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED: Dietz Verlag), 619.

³⁴ Sandro Mezzadra, *La condizione postcoloniale: Storia e politica nel presente globale* (Verona: Ombre Corte, 2008), 134.

of the origin, an origin through which we see the process of capture, the transformation of the primal flux of heterogeneity into commensurability. To return us to the essential question here, what is interesting in the process of primitive accumulation, understood in its broadest sense, is not merely the separation of enclosure and expropriation. Mezzadra touches on this in alluding to the relation of exception and normality which characterizes the problem of “origin.” The process of separation is not merely a divorcing of holistic, total communities from the land and from their supposedly “natural” ties, it is also a making-equivalent, the production of a hierarchical commensurability, which is the essential element of separation: it is never a separation as such, but always a separation-in-recombination.

The identification of the founding moment of the *nomos* with what Marx understood as “primitive accumulation” is a productive extension to Schmitt’s analysis. The *nomos*, or origin of order itself, is an essential question for today, not only in rethinking the debate on the transition to capitalism, but in extending this rethinking to the possibility that this transitional space, and indeed all such transitions themselves, are not static processes, but ongoing echoes and reverberations of the original appropriation and division. In the later corollaries to *The Nomos of the Earth*, by way of explicating in brief the reasons for his deployment of the concept of *nomos*, Schmitt approvingly quotes the German constitutional jurist Hans Peter Ipsen, who argued that in the final analysis socialization itself, the founding gesture of any social order was “making future owners of non-owners.”³⁵ This is a succinct and incisive summation of the movement by which capitalism becomes-necessary, making non-owners (the peasantry on communal land)

³⁵ Carl Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum*, trans. G.L. Ulmen (New York: Telos Press, 2003), 332.

into owners (of one thing, and one thing only: their labor power).

Schmitt famously stated, “History is not the realization of rules or regularities or scientific, biological, or other types of norms. Its essential and specific content is the event that arrives only once and does not repeat itself.”³⁶ Schmitt draws our attention to something critical in the event: its explosion and eruption, its status as a point and not a line, its singularity. But we must also draw attention to its residues, its remainders, its sustained traces: what Alain Badiou has extensively theorized as the excess of the event over the situation of its emergence, the event-element for which no necessity exists, in which there is no previously “countable” situation that proves or legitimates its arrival on the scene, when it explodes and punctures the “order of being.” The “essential and specific content” of history is precisely the event, the eruption into consistency of what was in flux, but the event of this making-determined does *not* arrive only once. It arrives continually *as if for the first time*, continually fixing what comes undone, continually capturing what is in flux or flight. Therefore, it is not that Schmitt is wrong to emphasize the single occasion of the event of origin: origin is itself a circuit which only repeats by returning to itself, by folding in on itself and thereby always being first, always being “one time only.”

The basic aim of Schmitt’s *The Nomos of the Earth* is to examine and question the process of the “original distribution/apportionment of land” (*ursprüngliche Boden-Verteilung*),³⁷ the originary decisional space which made spaces, territories, and the social relations that obtained within them commensurable to each other, the process of the

³⁶ Schmitt, *Du politique: légitimité et légalité et autres essais* (Puisseux: Pardès, 1990), 244-249.

³⁷ Schmitt, *Der Nomos der Erde im Völkerrecht des Jus Publicum Europaeum* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1974), 38; *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum*, trans. G.L. Ulmen (New York: Telos Press, 2003), 68.

constitution of the “international world.” Thus Schmitt’s concern is essentially parallel to that of Marx on the role of primitive accumulation in the constitution of the wage laborer and the capitalist: he does not begin from some apparent moment and deduce the present situation, but works retrospectively. In much the same way that Marx theorizes the process of primitive accumulation from an analytical standpoint which begins with the form of the commodity, Schmitt exhumes the historicity of the process of the formation of the interstate system from the vantage point of the *present* international order, for its traces and effects on the *nomos* of the earth, and the coming of a new *nomos*. But for Schmitt, what is the *nomos* itself?

Nomos is the *measure* (*Maß*) by which the land in a particular order is divided and situated; it is also the form of political, social, and religious order determined by this process. Here, measure, order (*Ordnung*), and form (*Gestalt*) constitute a spatially concrete unity. The *nomos* by which a tribe, a retinue, or a people becomes settled, i.e., by which it becomes historically situated (*geschichtlich verortet*) and turns a part of the earth’s surface into the force-field (*Kraftfeld*) of a particular order, becomes visible in the appropriation of land and in the founding of a city or a colony.³⁸

Just as Marx discovered the “secret” of the capitalist mode of production in the process of primitive accumulation as well as in the *creation* of labor power, Schmitt finds the key to the process by which something *diffuse* and in flux (“tribe, retinue, or people”) becomes something *fixed*, something “historically situated or located” (*geschichtlich verortet*), in the “appropriation of land and in the founding of a city or colony.” By relating the founding process of a city to that of the colonies, Schmitt emphasizes the degree to which what is decisive is not the differential between them, but the moment of fixation common to both, the common “measure” (*Maß*) of the process of place-ing and locating what was

³⁸ Schmitt, *Der Nomos der Erde im Völkerrecht des Jus Publicum Europaeum* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1974), 40; *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum*, trans. G.L. Ulmen (New York: Telos Press, 2003), 70.

formerly incommensurable in as much as it had no “measure.”

Thus, if these diffuse processes are to be understood on the basis of their common “measure,” Schmitt acknowledges that there must be an originary moment which grounds them together:

All subsequent regulations of a written or unwritten kind derive their power from the inner measure of an original, constitutive act of spatial ordering. This original act (*Ur-Akt*) is *nomos*. All subsequent developments are either results of and expansions on this act or else redistributions – either a continuation on the same basis or a disintegration and departure from the constitutive act of the spatial order established by land-appropriation, the founding of cities, or colonization.³⁹

Thus, Schmitt poses the question of the expropriation of land (primitive accumulation) as belonging to the same genealogy as the “founding moments” of history in general: they stem from an originary moment – a poietic-practical moment – past which we can only conceptually enter into the recursive cycle of origin itself. He calls this moment the *Ur-Akt* which founds the *nomos*. *Nomos* is thus a primal force, a moment of accumulation or gathering towards stability, order, unity. In other words, *nomos* is not merely the international order itself, or form of social ordering called the nation-state, but rather the uncanny force that grounds the untraceable origin of these mechanisms themselves, a flow of power that retrospectively sustains this order through its own dynamics. On this same point, Susan Buck-Morss incisively describes the *nomos* as an “aggregating force,” or “ordering principle” between sovereign power and state power, which concatenates or “holds together” the individual units of the nation-state system, not merely as “autochthonous” elements, each immanent only to itself, but as a sustaining force of

³⁹ Schmitt, *Der Nomos der Erde im Völkerrecht des Jus Publicum Europaeum* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1974), 47; *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum*, trans. G.L. Ulmen (New York: Telos Press, 2003), 78.

combination, which furnishes and maintains a *system* out of these elements.⁴⁰

This *Ur-Akt*, the event of the formation of order itself, is always arriving as if for the first time, and therefore is always the same, but precisely in its sameness regenerated by its constant arrival, it is simultaneously endlessly different: it is “the absent remainder/resistance of a differential mark cut off from its putative ‘production’ or origin” (*la restance non-présente d’une marque différentielle coupée de sa prétendue «production» ou origine*).⁴¹ This *Ur-Akt* is for Schmitt the primordial origin of the international state system, which is only one amongst a series of effects and results of the *nomos* process itself. But as he makes clear, this ordering or appropriation is a making-commensurable, placing elements formerly thoroughly heterogeneous to each other into contact by means of a common measure. Thus, for example “all states interested in a given territorial change in principle recognized the same economic order, even when they were at different stages of development.”⁴² Just as was emphasized by Marx, when colonization occurs, the most important initial process is that of ensuring that either the existing relations are broken, or that they are integrated into the general order. Only through such a process of “fixing” can the colonial dimension of the accumulation of

⁴⁰ Buck-Morss’s analysis in her “Sovereign Right and the Global Left,” in *Rethinking Marxism*, vol. 19, no. 4 (October 2007), brilliantly unpacks the question of the *nomos* in terms of the contemporary question of state legitimation, the mechanisms by which the international order “governs” itself, or cares for itself and thereby perpetuates itself precisely through its own paradoxical suspension. My attempt in the present essay presupposes a certain analytical division of labor with her discussion, by developing this paradoxical element that is concentrated in the question of the *nomos* in a slightly different direction. I try to cross-read the question of primitive accumulation with this Schmittian moment in order to “force the secret” (Marx 1996, 185-186) of the constitution and maintenance of that most retrograde idea and supreme political cretinism today: the supposed “clash” between “civilizations.”

⁴¹ Derrida, “Signature Event Context” in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 318. Translation modified.

⁴² Schmitt, *Der Nomos der Erde im Völkerrecht des Jus Publicum Europaeum* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1974), 169; *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum*, trans. G.L. Ulmen (New York: Telos Press, 2003), 197.

capital operate. In the final analysis, the “internationalization” of law through the experimentation in the colony could not produce an “international law” but only a national law that has been made commensurable inter-nationally. In the constitution process of international law, the role of the unit of the state exhibits the problem of the recursive problematic of the origin: “Interstate in no sense means the isolation of any subject in the international law of this type of order. On the contrary, the interstate character can be understood only within a comprehensive spatial order sustained by states.”⁴³ In other words, international law is what legitimizes, justifies, and sustains the order. But this law can only operate to the extent that the object it sustains is already in place and justified. So the self-justification of international law can only find proof for itself in precisely the object it creates, forming again the endlessly regressing sequence of the trace of the origin.

Further, the previously existing land relations, native practices, etc in the colonized space could not constitute foundations of an actual right, rather it is the colonial difference (the fixing of hierarchy and making-commensurable of “measures” such as race, relative social class within the previous social order, language capability, sexuality, and so forth) that ensures the specific coloniality of the situation at the margins of the inter-state system: the colonial collapse of the distinction between *imperium* and *dominium* – public and private property. Consequently:

The special territorial status of colonies thus was as clear as was the division of the earth between states territory and colonial territory. This division was characteristic of the structure of international law in this epoch and was inherent in its spatial structure. Clearly, to the extent that overseas colonial territory became indistinguishable from state territory, in the sense of European soil, the

⁴³ Schmitt, *Der Nomos der Erde im Völkerrecht des Jus Publicum Europaeum* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1974), 183; *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum*, trans. G.L. Ulmen (New York: Telos Press, 2003), 210.

structure of international law also changed, and when they became equivalent, traditional, specifically European law came to an end. Thus, the concept of colonies contained an ideological burden that affected, above all, European colonial powers.⁴⁴

As Schmitt here shows, when the historical-actual form of the colonial system fell apart, new commensurabilities were formed. Suddenly the colonial difference itself became a major problem, not only for the formerly colonized, but also as an “ideological burden” for the colonial powers. What was at stake for the colonizer in the separation, through the colonial difference, between the “mother country” and the “colony” was the self-image or the procedure of self-directed cathexis operating through it: in short, the constitution of the West. When the colonial system breaks, the problem is where the accumulated force that previously gathered in the colonial difference is dispersed to. And this retrospectively calls into question what the point of colonialism was to begin with – Schmitt has an answer – the “race for colonies also was concerned with more or less symbolic appropriations (*symbolische Besitzergreifungen*).”⁴⁵

The Formation of Difference

In order to clarify what is at stake in this question of Marx and Schmitt on the analysis of primitive accumulation, I would like to try to develop further the consequences of this problem of the “formation of difference.” Drawing out a concept of primitive accumulation as a repeating originary movement of capture from Marx, and a

⁴⁴ Schmitt, *Der Nomos der Erde im Völkerrecht des Jus Publicum Europaeum* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1974), 172; *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum*, trans. G.L. Ulmen (New York: Telos Press, 2003), 199.

⁴⁵ Schmitt, *Der Nomos der Erde im Völkerrecht des Jus Publicum Europaeum* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1974), 189; *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum*, trans. G.L. Ulmen (New York: Telos Press, 2003), 215.

concept of the primordial *Ur-Akt* of decision in the making-commensurable and spatial process of fixing from Schmitt, we must now locate in what ways the recent discourse on the return of primitive accumulation can be clarified through these readings. Many recent theoretical works, such as that of the Midnight Notes Collective on the *New Enclosures*,⁴⁶ Silvia Federici's *Caliban and the Witch*, among others, have focused on the role of intellectual property, the new "digital commons" of the world, and on the new superstate forms of control being visited on the former colonized countries, in particular the violent transitions currently occurring in sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere to rationalized systems of private property, spurred on by the dependent relations these states have through the national debt to the International Monetary Fund and World Bank.

But Federici in particular has drawn an entirely new picture of the period of primitive accumulation and the theoretical clarification of enclosure as a broad category, by examining the "enclosure" of the female body itself, the complex violence of creation of new categories which this enclosure signifies. She argues that "primitive accumulation... connects the 'feudal reaction' with the development of a capitalist economy, and it identifies the historical and logical conditions for the development of the capitalist system, 'primitive' ('originary') indicating a precondition for the existence of capitalist relations as much as a specific event in time."⁴⁷ That is, Federici extends and develops the essential insight latent in Marx's analysis, and implied by Schmitt's theorization of the *nomos*, that the original accumulation, or enclosure, is not something

⁴⁶ The essential reference here is the widely influential issue of *Midnight Notes* entitled *The New Enclosures*, no. 10 (Fall 1990). See on this collection of documents Mezzadra's *La condizione postcoloniale*, 128-130.

⁴⁷ Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, The Body, and Primitive Accumulation* (New York: Autonomedia, 2004), 63.

which happens once and is then followed by a new historical cycle. Rather, primitive accumulation as a process is precisely a network of capturing the energy which is in flux and re-deploying it in an order, recoding its surface so as to be directly compatible, commensurable, with the starting-point of capitalist production. Therefore, much like Schmitt's use of the term *nomos*, it is not only a "precondition" but that which establishes the network of "preconditions" itself. Federici continues with the following critical point: "primitive accumulation was not simply an accumulation and concentration of exploitable workers and capital. It was also *an accumulation of differences and divisions within the working class*, whereby hierarchies built upon gender, as well as 'race' and age, became constitutive of class rule and the formation of the modern proletariat."⁴⁸ Federici's point here is exceptionally important.

In order to understand primitive accumulation not merely as the moment of dispossession, the raw violence of expropriation, we must understand its creative, or formative aspect, the fact that primitive accumulation itself should always be conceived of as the broad deployment of apparatuses intended to form "an accumulation of differences, inequalities, hierarchies, divisions."⁴⁹ Federici here inverts a certain traditional Marxian schematics of the pyramidal structure of history (although Marx and Engels had an entirely more subtle view of this), by arguing against the linearization of "progress," the notion that each social shift characterizes a higher, and therefore preferable state of affairs: "We cannot say that the separation of the worker from the land and the advent of a money-economy realized the struggle which the medieval serfs had

⁴⁸ Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, The Body, and Primitive Accumulation* (New York: Autonomedia, 2004), 63-64.

⁴⁹ Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, The Body, and Primitive Accumulation* (New York: Autonomedia, 2004), 115.

fought to free themselves from bondage. It was not the workers – male or female – who were liberated by land privatization. What was ‘liberated’ was capital, as the land was now ‘free’ to function as a means of accumulation and exploitation, rather than as a means of subsistence.”⁵⁰ Federici’s analysis is extremely powerful precisely because she identifies this process of primitive accumulation, the moment of the enclosures movement taken in the broadest sense possible, with the formation of *specific* difference. She carefully demonstrates that primitive accumulation did not simply mean expropriation (deterritorialization), but also meant the re-deployment of the captured bodies, concepts, words, land, borders, rituals, effects, and so forth in a new hierarchical network of signification which formed and effectuated the corollary “preconditions” for the advent of capitalist relations of production (reterritorialization): the creation of “owners” from “non-owners.”⁵¹ What precisely is the role of this continual enclosure? Sakiyama Masaki writes, “Thus the capitalist system emerges through the combination of the process of continual primitive accumulation with the process of the accumulation of capital. Continual primitive accumulation is based on direct violence, plunder, and unlimited exploitation, and the main sources of this accumulation are nature (for

⁵⁰ Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, The Body, and Primitive Accumulation* (New York: Autonomedia, 2004), 75.

⁵¹ Let me note that in relation to this discussion of Federici’s, Sandro Mezzadra has pointed out: “In the contemporary debate on the theme of the commons, too often a nostalgic tone tends to prevail, exactly as if these ‘common goods’ were merely something given – and that need to be conserved. In this sense, although I otherwise value the book, Silvia Federici’s *Caliban and the Witch* is symptomatic: by beginning from an emphasis on the sacrosanct, autonomous behavior and resistance of women in the countryside to the attempts to put their sexuality under control between the medieval period and the early modern state, Federici in fact ends up proposing a somewhat “idyllic,” and decidedly unsustainable representation of European feudalism” (Mezzadra, *La condizione postcoloniale*, 153). Mezzadra here identifies something important in relation to the political consequences of Federici’s discussion, and his emphasis on the need to always consider the commons to be a production and not a discovery is a crucial point. Nevertheless, Federici’s historical analysis is of the utmost importance in clarifying the question of primitive accumulation as a formation-process, and not simply a process of dispossession.

example, the land worked by the peasantry), women, and the colonies.”⁵² In my view, Sakiyama here correctly and importantly emphasizes the *continual* nature of the process of primitive accumulation, the fact that this process is not a “period” strictly speaking, but a *logical* moment in the real movement of history. However, it seems to me that what is distinctive about this moment is not only its “direct violence” (although this is crucial too), but must also be considered from the aspect of the fundamentally “indirect” violence of enclosure as a continuous movement. In other words, developing Federici’s important emphasis on the “accumulation of differences,” we should understand this continuously reproduced enclosure as a refined and supple violence which concatenates waves of the primordial flux of bodies, practices, words, and affects into the systematic structuring pattern of commensurable specific differences which arises as a function of the nation-state system and the advent of capitalism.

We can also understand this “creative” element of enclosure in a strictly “economic” sense, in terms of the logic of capital. As Baba Hiroji has argued, “primitive accumulation is typically understood as the violent expropriation of land from the peasantry, but actually its essence lies in the *creation* of labor power which can be commodified.” In other words, he argues, it is a “process of tearing labor power away from traditional agriculturally-centered self-sufficient production, and re-cultivating it into something with labor practices and skills suitable for modern industrially-centered mass production.”⁵³ That is, we cannot simply say that the movement of enclosures is a moment of expropriational violence, wherein those who held communal property were

⁵² Sakiyama Masaki, “Shūhen no keizokuteki saiseisan” [The Continual Reproduction of the Periphery] in *Shihon (Shikō no furontia)* [Capital – Frontiers of Thought] (Iwanami Shoten, 2004), 113.

⁵³ Baba Hiroji, *Fuyūka to kinyū shihon* [Affluentization and Finance Capital] (Minerva Shobō, 1986), 41.

dispossessed. Rather, we should also point out in the same time that this movement is the set of acts whereby they are made into owners, that is, they are *constituted* as owners of something they never knew they had before: labor power. Karatani Kōjin has explicated this point, arguing that what is essential in Marx's discussion of primitive accumulation is not merely the commodification of labor power – strictly speaking, he states, this is somewhat tautological on a logical level, because the concept of labor power itself (separate from labor) is already derived from the prior analysis of the commodity. Rather, he argues, what is decisive in this discussion, is that the period of primitive accumulation describes the “historical appearance of the *owner* of the labor power commodity.”⁵⁴ In other words, “the proletariat appears not as a human who simply possesses nothing, but rather as the *owner* of a certain commodity. The capitalist social system first emerges when the commodity economy subsumes labor power as a commodity into it. But there is no need to insert certain ‘historical conditions’ here, as Marx does. This is precisely because in the expansion of the commodity economy, the ‘free laborer’ in a double sense is born, on the one hand, through the advent of bourgeois legal thought, or Protestantism, and on the other hand, as the result of the ‘enclosures’ undertaken to enable capitalist production.”⁵⁵ That is, the problem of enclosure, the problem of the origin and reproduction-cycle that enables capitalist social relations to continue “as if” they are endless shows us again that this logic is always being renewed, that it is not something which occurs only once. Every time labor power as a commodity is subsumed systematically, the circuit-process which originates with the enclosures renews itself.

This process, in Schmitt's incisive formulation, is that of the continual

⁵⁴ Karatani Kōjin, *Marukusu sono kanōsei no chūshin* [Marx – the Center of his Possibilities] (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1990), 72.

⁵⁵ Karatani, *Marukusu sono kanōsei no chūshin*, 74.

transformation of territory into a “forcefield” (*Kraftfeld*), a field onto which the “historically situated” sequence can be inscribed as a unitary people, for whom the field or area becomes that which explains them. It is a process of the naturalization and grounding of the flux of difference onto a transformed site, forming a new set of referral loops and feedback mechanisms enabling the circuit of explaining and explained to repeat such that the loop itself cannot be questioned from within it. Schmitt’s earlier enigmatic statement that the “race for colonies also was concerned with more or less symbolic appropriations (*symbolische Besitzergreifungen*),” can be read in at least two basic directions. On the one hand, it is a commonsensical point that symbolism was decisive in the inter-imperialist competition to enclose the largest portion of the earth’s territory. On the other hand, it can be read as the question of what exactly was being appropriated symbolically, that is what forces or flows were being gathered as symbols in the colony?

Johannes Fabian has drawn attention to the epistemic ordering of the international world as a disjunct temporal unity, as an “allochronic” schema, whereby the underdeveloped, the “Rest” in the “West and the Rest” dyad, are schematized to literally live in the past, as objects of analysis, objects to be “observed and gathered.”⁵⁶ But let us read Schmitt’s “gathering of symbolic appropriations” in relation to Fabian’s discussion of symbolic anthropology, the chief result of which is the iconization of the Other, the discovery of the Other as “form” or “style.”⁵⁷ That is, the Other becomes a symbolic index of the distancing effect in the specular field of observer and observed, and the observer’s logic of respect for the symbolic economy of the “native” enters directly into the slipstream of the circularity and referral loops of the origin. By “respecting” “their”

⁵⁶ Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 122.

⁵⁷ Fabian, *Time and the Other* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 123-141.

“difference,” by drawing attention to “their” “own” practices – statements which, due to the enunciative positionality of the observer, are addressed fundamentally only to other potential observers – the observer makes the Other an “icon,” gathers the symbolic traces of the Other’s alterity, and ensures their unified stability for future observation. That is, this logic of the symbolic gathering reconnects the flow of symbolic practices to the establishment of the *nomos*, the process of primitive accumulation, or the flow of bordering which “historically situated” the empirical singularities in flux onto this territory in the first place. But through the anthropological observation and gathering of the symbolic, the Other’s alterity appears to be grounded and naturalized in the Other’s “own” symbolic economy as “natural” expression of the “area” (Schmitt’s *Kraftfeld*) and its unique inhabitants.

Thus, through the general movement of enclosure, a new circuit of naturalization is established. Enclosed in the order of a world made of nation-states, and overseen by capital, the flux of bodies which previously existed will thereafter become a group, the flux of words will be segmented into the form of national language, the flux of rituals will be computed as evidence of the “cultural specificity” of “a people,” and so forth. It is always a retrospective process, something which can only be understood post-festum. The putative existence since time immemorial of “the people” as a cultural unity is always supposedly grounded in the untraceable origin of their “practices,” but these practices themselves have to be made to retrospectively connote the existence of “the people,” since as a pure sequence of practices they exist prior to “connotation” itself. In other words, we can posit the discovery of the ancient past of a certain “national people” or putatively “cultural” sequence, but only post-festum. That is, the *Ur-Akt* of the *nomos*,

the process of primitive accumulation, does not make the old practices into new ones: it insinuates itself within the flux of practices and establishes a surrounding order in which to compute and recode them, it gives them a “new social soul.” Thereafter, this order overdetermines these practices such that they come to be retrospectively “proven” by the existence of the “national people” whose existence they, in fact, are paradoxically supposed to prove. This circularity of identity is precisely what is installed historically by the movement of primitive accumulation, it is precisely this aspect of the enclosures that we should read in Marx when he emphasizes that it is “economic conditions” that “create conditions and differences among peoples independent of the ‘State’.”⁵⁸

The “direct” violence of dispossession through which order itself is formed must always be politically and historically analyzed for its destruction and devastation, but it is the refined, subtle, astonishing violence of this vast and aporetic formation of difference itself which is often elided. In other words, in order to grasp this problem, we must always treat the process of primitive accumulation as a dual process: on the one hand, it connotes the untraceable historical emergence of labor power which can be commodified, and on the other hand, it is a historical site of the *Ur-Akt* that founded and ordered the world as a *nomos*, as a system. These two aspects are intimately joined: the first sets in motion the paradoxical cycle of social relations called “capital,” while the second organizes the “formation of difference” through which the earth’s surface is recoded as a “forcefield” of the order. That is, when Marx undertakes his critique of political economy, he exposes the phenomenal representation of social relations as pure exchange by returning us to “the reckless terrorism” of the formation of labor power as a

⁵⁸ Marx, “Preparatory Materials – Notes on Bakunin’s Book *Statehood and Anarchy*” in *MECW*, vol. 24 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1989), 507.

commodity. But this moment of enclosure is not only the excessive moment that grounds the circuit of origin, it is at the same time the condition or starting point for the possibility of grasping the historical process as something evental, something hazardous, against the constantly rejuvenated tendency to romanticize and substantialize the “civilizational difference,” “the people,” and so forth as a pre-existing space of holism. It is precisely through this doubled examination of the formation of difference as a constituent part of the process of primitive accumulation, the central moment in the *nomos*, the order of the modern world, that we can approach the uncanny “similarities between the logic of slave labor upon which wage labor secretly rests and the regime of translation upon which national language is secretly built,” processes that are erroneously “associated with the pure economy of exchange.”⁵⁹

In this sense, the process of primitive accumulation (which is not a period, but a cyclically reproduced logical moment) describes the installation of “real abstraction” into history, and the fact that this moment is repeating everyday shows us the paradoxical nature of the historical temporality that characterizes capitalist society. More than anything however, we are immediately made aware of the violence of the production of the conditions of possibility for capitalist relations of production, for the ‘encounter’ between buyers and sellers of labor power. Here we are reminded that “there is a primitive accumulation that, far from deriving from the agricultural mode of production, precedes it: as a general rule, there is primitive accumulation whenever an apparatus of capture is mounted, with that very particular kind of violence that creates or contributes

⁵⁹ Naoki Sakai and Jon Solomon, “Addressing the Multitude of Foreigners, Echoing Foucault” in *Traces 4: Translation, Biopolitics, Colonial Difference* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006), 28.

to the creation of that which it is directed against, and thus presupposes itself.”⁶⁰

From Originary to Primitive

There is a long debate on the translation of *die sogenannte ursprüngliche Akkumulation* as the so-called *primitive* accumulation. But I would like to give this debate an added dimension: what we must consider is *how the originary accumulation is incorporated into capitalist development as primitive accumulation*, as a repetition of the origin that is also concerned with the division or “separation” (*Trennung*) of historical time between the “primitive” or “backwards” and the “on time” or “normal” course of development. The trick of primitive accumulation is to work on these two dimensions at once, as part of the same social motion, to divide the earth on the basis of “forms” in the same way as the abstraction of the exchange process is divided between “two sides.” In other words, this moment of the beginning, which is cyclically-recursively repeated within the sphere of crisis (and in every capture of the worker’s body to secure the grounds for the labor-power commodity), is repeated in relation to a volatile historical exterior, repeated in terms of the form-determination of the “nation-form” (Balibar) and the “historical and moral factors” for the determination of the value and price of labor power, the “naïve anthropology” (Althusser) that lurks in the interior of capital’s logic. Capital’s schema of the world divided up into “national capitals” is itself profoundly linked to the historical formation of so-called “homo economicus,” in the form of the two figures of exchange, buyers and sellers. In other words, the figure of “Man” -- as Deleuze

⁶⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille plateaux* (Paris: Minuit, 1980), 558-559; *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. B. Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 447.

and Guattari importantly point out, this figure of humanism is not simply “white man” (*l’homme blanc*) but rather “White Man” (*L’Homme blanc*) -- is not an “exteriority” or “cultural supplement” to the economic field: it is rather the presupposition always-already at the very core of the circulation process.

The image of the world that capital presents to itself, by presupposing a certain accomplished history, also presupposes the production of the individuals that would furnish the “needs” upon which “rational” exchange would emerge. But the very production of these individuals itself presupposes the unitary and eternal *area*, or gradient which could legitimate those individuals *as* individuals by means of the form of belonging, typically to the nation-state. Thus, the whole circuit constitutes a “vicious circle,” one which never adequately returns to its starting point, because the whole sequence of presupposition forms an abyssal and regressive chain, in which something must *always* be given: “the homogeneous given space of economic phenomena is thus doubly given by the anthropology which grips it in the vice of origins and ends.”⁶¹ The field of “interest,” which is supposed to represent therefore the pure or immediate expression of “need,” separated from any extra-economic coercion, direct violence, and so forth, reveals itself as the ultimate expression of this “vice of origins and ends,” insofar as it must always erase or cover over the production of this figure of “Man” itself. When Marx discusses the figures of the “guardians,” the “bearers” or “owners” of the labor power commodity, he refers to them specifically as “this *race* of peculiar commodity-owners” (*diese Race eigentümlicher Warenbesitzer*),⁶² effectively reminding

⁶¹ L. Althusser, “The Object of Political Economy” in *Reading Capital*, trans. B. Brewster (London: Verso), 163.

⁶² Marx, *Das Kapital*, Bd. 1 in *MEW*, Bd. 23, op. cit., 186; *Capital*, vol. 1 in *MECW*, vol. 35, op. cit., 182.

us that “the schema of the West and the Rest” is co-extensive and co-emergent with the dynamics of capital itself.

In other words, the “naïve anthropology” that is supposedly excluded from the circulation process or the “total material exchange” between “rational” individuals, is in fact located at its very core. Exactly as Deleuze and Guattari point out in their identification of the nation-state as the ultimate model of the capitalist axiomatic, the form of “the nation” is already contained at the very origin of the supposedly “rational” and “universal” process of exchange, a process that acts as if it represents the smooth and perfect circle of pure rationality, but that is permanently suspended between its impossible origin, which it is compelled to cyclically repeat, and its end, which is equally impossible, because it would relativize the circuit of exchange, and expose it to its outside, which it must constantly erase. Thus the social body or *socius* itself must remain in its state of insanity or “derangement” forever pulled in two directions of the production of subjects. It cannot exit this “deranged form,” but must try perpetually to prove its “universality” simply by oscillating between these two boundaries, two impossibilities: its underlying *schema of the world*, which “seems *absent* from the immediate reality of the phenonoma themselves” because it is permanently located in “the interval between origins and ends,” a short-circuit that incessantly reveals to us that “its universality is merely repetition.”⁶³ The paradox of logic and history in the apparatus of capture thus is contained in the following problem: “the mechanism of capture contributes from the outset to the constitution of the aggregate upon which the capture is effectuated” (*le mécanisme de capture fait déjà partie de la constitution de l’ensemble sur lequel la*

⁶³ Althusser, “The Object of Political Economy,” op. cit., 163.

capture s'effectue).⁶⁴ This paradox, however, is “no mystery at all” (*pas du tout de mystère*), precisely because it is a mechanism or schema that exists out in the open, on the surface of society. The historical accident, the moment of capture for which there was no apparent necessity or pulsion, produces a form of torsion back upon itself. Once capture has been effected, it loops back onto its own contingent origins to once again *derive itself*, to anticipate and “conjure” itself up *as if it were the necessary outcome of its own schema*. In other words, the forms of capture, enclosure, and ordering are not simply distinguished by their appearance as always-already prior; more fundamentally, they are distinguished by this paradoxical and demented structure in which the contingent historical event cycles back to itself, once again “discovering” its own hazardous origins, but does so precisely to “recode” its emergence so as to appear as if what ought to be an accident was always in fact a necessary outcome. Thus, the historical accident of primitive accumulation is constantly “becoming what it is” neither through its contingent foundations nor its inner drive to pretend it is necessary; this schema operates precisely by cyclically repeating its origin in capture in order to harness its hazardous flux retrospectively, to conjure itself up *as if* its origin were a mere testament to its necessary emergence.

In this system of the violence of inclusion, the violence of the schema itself “hides in plain view,” it operates immediately before our eyes, yet “it is very difficult to pinpoint this violence because it always presents itself as preaccomplished.”⁶⁵ The seeming double-bind contained in the violence of the apparatus of capture might appear to disable

⁶⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille plateaux* (Paris: Minuit, 1980), 557; *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. B. Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 446.

⁶⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille plateaux* (Paris: Minuit, 1980), 557; *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. B. Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 446.

any conception of political intervention, to be a closed circle, but we could also say precisely the opposite. In the process of primitive accumulation, “the concept of ‘determined social formation’ has become the concept of ‘class composition’: it restores, in other words, the dynamism of the subject’s action, of the will that structures or destroys the relations of necessity.”⁶⁶ In other words, paradoxically it is the fact that our foreclosure into the social field *has taken place* that opens the possibilities of politics. We have always-already been *included* into this systematic expression of capture, but this inescapability of the repetition of the beginning does not mean something disabling. This primal violence, sustained as a continuum or “status quo,” appears as a smooth state, a cyclical reproduction cycle without edges. But this appearance or semblance of smooth continuity is in fact a product of the working of violence upon itself: *the violence of the historical cartography must erase and recode itself by means of violence as the smooth functioning of the logical topology.*

The National Debt: The Conduit for the Repetition of Primitive Accumulation

Every time capital requires the commodification of labor power, it must in effect repeat at the level of the logical topology the process of the *transition*, the “so-called primitive accumulation.” But the historical process simultaneously forces capital to undertake the transition at a microscopic level, in the form of the shrinking commodity-

⁶⁶ A. Negri, *Marx beyond Marx: Lessons on the Grundrisse* (London: Pluto, 1991), 111. It is precisely this point that allows us to an extent to cross-read the history of the analysis of the value-form with Deleuze and Guattari’s work on capitalism’s “dementia,” a cross-reading that should also be linked to a complete rethinking of the *aesthetic* and *ethical* arrangements that inhere in the historiographical discussions of so-called “uneven development.” In relation to this important passage, let me note also that Negri’s conception of the subject is always linked to the production of subjectivity, to the gathering or arrangement of possible expressions and should never be misunderstood as something like “the national subject.”

unit, and therefore in an even more paradoxical form than the historical “beginning.” That is, capital must *capitalistically* undertake a microscopic version of the transition to capitalism. At the “beginning” capital could rely on direct force, on a structural violence that would enable or set in motion a field of effects that would generate a general order of capture. But how can the transition be undertaken over and over again, in particular *after* the historical transition is assumed to have already occurred? Marx gave us an essential clue when he reminded us that the so-called primitive accumulation in effect reappears or takes up a second *logical* position in capital’s interior, in the form of *the national debt*.

The original sin at the beginning of the capital-relation might as well be understood as an “original debt,” an historical appearance of something *given*, a *gift*. The process of primitive accumulation and its historical acts of enclosure cannot simply be understood as an excessive violence that is then superseded by a more “rational” or “decent” and “restrained” order. Rather, what the process of primitive accumulation reminds us of, is the necessity for capital of the given, the form of “supposition” (*Setzung*) and “presupposition” (*Voraussetzung*). But how does this originary debt-gift operate? In what sense is this a problem of *actuality* for us? In this sense, what exactly is the national debt itself?

The national debt is a *mechanism*. A very special type of mechanism, and one that capital relies on intimately. Uno Kozo gave us a critical clue to this type of mechanism – it is a “*mechanism or apparatus which allow the (im)possibility of the commodification of labor power to pass through (‘muri’ wo tôsu kikô)*.”⁶⁷ Uno locates this mechanism in the form of the “law of population peculiar to the capitalist mode of production” (*der*

⁶⁷ Uno Kôzô, “Benshōhōteki mujun ni tsuite” in *Uno Kôzô chosakushū*, vol. 10 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1974), 426-427. We will analyze this entire field of points, particularly around this concept of *muri*, in the following chapter.

kapitalistischen Produktionsweise eigentümliches Populationsgesetz),⁶⁸ a law that is central to the questions of crisis and debt, because it concerns above all the management of *personhood*, the management of the physical-moral aspects of the material existence of the body, so as to maintain the “rational individual,” the form which would furnish adequate labor power for capitalist production. But this structure of such an apparatus is not *limited* to the form of population; rather the “law of population” is one moment of the overall taxonomy of these mechanisms for the traversal of the *nihil* of reason that capitalism necessitates from the outset. If at the beginning, there is a debt or gift, capital cannot ever truly “begin.” That is, it is impossible to “start from the first instance” if the first instance is always-already delayed or deferred by means of something that must be there already. In other words, if capital can only expand on the basis of its originary debt/gift, then capital is permanently or eternally crippled and restrained by the nature of this given element, it can never extract itself from what is given in order to fully realize its image of a circle with neither end nor beginning. In order therefore, to overcome or at least *avoid* this problem, capital must formulate all sorts of these “apparatuses for the traversal of (im)possibility.” That is, capital must discover ways in which something that should restrain or even expose its limitations can be *traversed* or *passed through*. But precisely in constantly requiring mechanisms or apparatuses outside its interior logic, capital demonstrates its relatively volatile functioning, in which precisely its excessive aspects (the reliance on the state, the enforcement of the nation-form, the violence of the exterior allowed into the interior and once more erased *as violence by means of*

⁶⁸ K. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 in *MECW*, vol. 35, 626; *Das Kapital*, Bd. 1 in *MEW*, Bd. 23, 660. In the 4th German edition, Marx also adds a decisive and more systematic phrasing here, when he mentions “the law of progressive diminution of the relative magnitude of variable capital” (*das Gesetz der progressiven Abnahme der relativer Größe des variablen Kapitals*) in *MECW*, vol. 35, 625; *MEW*, Bd. 23, 660.

violence), its paradoxical and even “demented” aspects, appear as the central principles of its operation. When we confront this “demented” or “deranged” aspect of capital, we are also immediately alerted to the fact that this aspect of capital is also where an immense political breach exists, and it is on this point that we must clarify the current scenario of debt.

Marx recalls this problem for us at an early historical moment, reminding us that the system of national debt was generated in the “forcing-house” (*Treibhaus*) of the colonial system: thus “National debts, *i.e.*, the alienation of the state (*Veräußerung des Staats*) – whether despotic, constitutional or republican – marked with its stamp the capitalistic era.”⁶⁹ In this sense, already we are acquainted with the national debt as the “mark” or “stamp” (*Stempel*) of the entry into capitalist society on a world-scale, as the initial moment in which the originary accumulation of capital is at one and the same time the formation of the mechanisms that will install a cartography onto the surface of the world.

The only part of the so-called national wealth that actually enters into the collective possessions (*Gesamtbesitz*) of modern peoples is their national debt. Hence, as a necessary consequence, the modern doctrine that a nation becomes the richer the more deeply it is in debt. Public credit becomes the *credo* of capital. And with the rise of national debt-making, want of faith in the national debt takes the place of the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, which may not be forgiven. *The public debt becomes one of the most powerful levers (energischsten Hebel) of primitive accumulation.* As with the stroke of an enchanter’s wand, it endows barren money with the power of breeding and thus turns it into capital, without the necessity of its exposing itself to the troubles and risks inseparable from its employment in industry or even in usury.⁷⁰

The logical topology of capital’s origin and maintenance, and the historical cartography of the modern world order, based on the unit of the state, are volatilyly amalgamated

⁶⁹ K. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 in *MECW*, vol. 35, 742; *Das Kapital*, Bd. 1 in *MEW*, Bd. 23, 782.

⁷⁰ K. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 in *MECW*, vol. 35, 742; *Das Kapital*, Bd. 1 in *MEW*, Bd. 23, 782.

together in the form of the national debt. But Marx also alerts us to something critically important: here the national debt is not so much a separate motion of violence, but rather one of the most “powerful” or “energetic” “levers” for the continuation or maintenance of primitive accumulation. But why would capital need yet another exteriority? Primitive accumulation itself, its raw violence, its “extra-economic coercion,” is already to an extent exterior to capital. Yet what capital always requires are ways and means of taking the raw violence on which it secretly rests and reinserting this violence into a new modality, in which its violence can appear in another form. This is exactly why the national debt, as a *mechanism*, allows capital to avoid “exposing itself to troubles and risks.” Marx goes one step further, by connecting the national debt as primitive accumulation to the nation-form itself:

With the national debt arose an international credit system, which often conceals one of the sources (*Quellen*) of primitive accumulation in this or that people (*Volk*). [...] A great deal of capital, which appears today in the United States without any certificate of birth, was yesterday, in England, the capitalised blood of children.⁷¹

In other words, capital’s enclosure of the earth appears both within and by means of national borders – by extension, Marx essentially reminds us here that the nation-form itself allows for the concealing within an organized and bordered system of entities, of capital’s originary-primitive violence, and yet erases this violence precisely by allowing it to vanish into the nation as an apparatus for the traversal of this gap, “vanishing in its own result, leaving no trace behind.” But this theoretical and historical problem is by no means simply an interesting episode from the past. Here we can see clearly the operation that proceeded in the German “gutter press” in 2010-2011, when the Greek national debt

⁷¹ K. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 in *MECW*, vol. 35, 743-44; *Das Kapital*, Bd. 1 in *MEW*, Bd. 23, 783-84.

(and by extension the ongoing Eurozone crisis) was in essence blamed on the Greek “national character” (supposedly “lazy,” excessively enjoying holidays, corrupt, incapable of “rational competition,” and so forth).⁷²

This moment of the German-Greek opposition on the question of the national debt exposes to us the recent history of this mechanism. The era of imperialism in the strict sense consisted in the formation of “debt traps” for the peripheral and underdeveloped countries: the central imperialist nations export the domestic surplus to the colonies, the periphery, and so forth, by creating and enforcing demand, maintained by the national debt. Thus the poorer nations end up not only importing from the imperialist nations but also effectively in an endless spiral of debt, a mechanism that then forces the periphery to accept the political and economic directives of the imperialist nations for the plunder and expropriation of raw materials, cheap labor power, border controls, subordination to political regimes, and so forth. Today, this same logic persists. If the old modality of imperialism consists in the macroscopic formation of monopoly capital and super-profits in the peripheral violence, the new modality of imperialism financializes this violence into the miniature and dense concentration of capital’s interior. It is no accident that today we see a “return of the origin,” “a moment when wage constriction is violently manifested, exactly like the 16th century enclosures where access to land as a common

⁷² Let us note on this point that the “nationality” of crisis is not simply a question of history, in the sense of a question that has been overcome. Throughout the ongoing debt crisis in the Eurozone, and particularly in the Greek case, “explanations” of the situation have been relentlessly rerouted to racial-national stereotypes and old-style “national character” studies. Of course, all of these so-called “explanations” of the crisis are absurd. The German tabloid “newspaper” (one hesitates to truly call it a newspaper) *Bild* placed the following headline on the front of the daily news: «Verkauft doch eure Inseln, ihr Pleite-Griechen!» (Literally, “Sell your islands, you bankrupt Greeks!”). In response to this, the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung released an excellent pamphlet, comprehensively debunking all the ideological presuppositions that characterized the attempt to place the national debt into the realm of “national character.” See <http://www.rosalux.de/publication/37617/verkauft-doch-eure-inseln-ihr-pleite-griechen.html>.

good was repressed with the privatization of the land and the putting of wages to the proletariat.”⁷³ This is why we should overlap capital’s historical threshold with the moment we are living through today:

The logic of ‘governing through debt’ has its origin in the fundamental relation between capital and labor. Financial capitalism has globalized imperialism, its *modus operandi* that operates through the form of ‘debt traps’, both national and private indebtedness, in order to realize and sell the surplus value extracted from living labor. In the imperial schema, debt is the monetary face of surplus value, the universal exploitation of labor power, and constitutes a trap precisely because it prevents living labor from freeing itself from exploitation, from autonomizing the relations of dependency and slavery that are proper to debt.⁷⁴

The national debt allows the “reckless terrorism” of primitive accumulation to be maintained as if it were absent by redirecting it to the market. The national debt is a mechanism that “conducts” or forces the situation onto a new site of the curve of capitalist development, but it is not a mechanism that “resolves,” it is a mechanism that “defers” or “displaces” the sharpening of political struggles. The national debt therefore is like the *pharmakon* – it heals and hurts, it defers and differs, it is precisely the “dangerous supplement” of capitalism as a historical force: the national debt exposes the fact that capital itself can never resolve the situation that emerges when the relations of production come into conflict with the development of the productive forces. Capital therefore is always trying to create mechanisms that allow it to transcend its own limitations, while simultaneously permitting it to avoid making the political leap past its own boundaries. Yet, this inevitable limit of capital’s self-deployment is paradoxically the source of capital’s own dynamism. Without this tense multiplication of its wounds,

⁷³ C. Marazzi, *The Violence of Financial Capitalism*, New Edition (New York: Semiotext(e), 2011), 118.

⁷⁴ Christian Marazzi, “Un orizzonte sovranazionale per rompere la trappola del debito,” in *Il manifesto*, 16 December 2011, p. 11. See also Andrea Fumagalli, “Lotte di classe nel default” in the same issue, p. 10.

capital would never develop – that is, capital requires a certain risk or recklessness, but the more it defers this leap, the more spaces of political intervention are opened up in capital’s austere movement. This movement keeps the elements of primitive accumulation circulating on the surface, a mechanism by which to traverse the impossibility of the commencement as such, precisely by beginning the commencement over and over again. In turn, this element of the national debt returns our focus to the role played by the nation-state in allowing this “first return to origins” – the element of the national is exactly deployed in and within the movement of capture in order to guarantee labor power’s “elasticity” (*Elastizität*).⁷⁵ Without the nation, the malleable elements of labor power cannot be recirculated as if they were directly graspable, by means of the reproduction of the worker’s body on the outside. The nation – the original fictitious “substance” – conjures up its own little images of its pseudo-substantiality precisely in order to then “re-derive” itself from their existence. In this way the elasticity of labor power is simply the microscopic or “micrological” extension of the elasticity of the *nation*, the form by which capital attempts incessantly to territorialize itself. Labor power’s impossibility is a microscopic image of the gap or chiasmus between the logical and the historical: the historical *origin* and the logical *commencement*, and this is the point on which “the insanity of the capitalist mode of conception (*die Verrücktheit der kapitalistischen Vorstellungsweise*) reaches its climax.”⁷⁶

On the question of the so-called primitive accumulation, the form of the national debt alerts us to a crucial fact: “The crisis is neither an economic nor a political crisis: it

⁷⁵ Marx, *Das Kapital*, Bd. 1 in *MEW*, 630; *Capital*, vol. 1 in *MECW*, vol. 35, 599.

⁷⁶ K. Marx, *Kapital*, Bd. 3 in *MEW*, Bd. 25, 463; *Capital*, vol. 3 in *MECW*, vol. 37, 483. Here, we should recall that for Uno Kozo, the “automatically interest-bearing capital” plays the same structural role for capital as the “absolute Idea” within the Hegelian logic.

is a crisis of the capital relation, a crisis made inevitable by the inherent contradictions of that relation. The crisis inevitably involves a restructuring of the capital relation, a restructuring which necessarily takes on economic and political forms. What is involved on both levels is an *assault by capital* to maintain the conditions of its own existence.”⁷⁷ In this sense, the problem of the national debt as a mechanism for the continuation of primitive accumulation *within* the capital-relation, cannot be solved on the level of the nation-form – we might say polemically that the national debt is in fact the origin of the nation itself. It itself is a technology of drawing a border around the form of the nation, something that cannot be rigorously bordered. The nation itself is a form of credit: it must be traced *as if* it could be located. But it must be traced by capital itself. Because the nation cannot be bordered in any strict sense, it *forces a coherence* economically where there cannot be one historically. But because this technology continuously exposes it to the historical exterior, it is therefore always being undermined by its own inability to escape the historical process. At the origin there is already a debt, because something has been presupposed as given, something that utilizes this presupposition as a lever for its own functioning. The illogical logic of capital’s origin or beginning is recoded as the illogical history of the state. This “intercourse” between capital and the state is concentrated or compressed into the insanity of the supposedly rational exchange process, this “Verkehr” at the beginning which appears precisely as “Austausch” in the logical interior. This is exactly what Lenin meant when he famously emphasized that “politics is the concentrated expression of economy.”⁷⁸

⁷⁷ J. Holloway and S. Picciotto, “Capital, Crisis and the State” in *Capital and Class*, vol. 1, no. 2 (Summer 1977), 92.

⁷⁸ V.I. Lenin, “Once Again on the Trade Unions” in *Collected Works of V.I. Lenin*, vol. 32 (Moscow: Progress, 1976).

Capital itself formulates these apparatuses – the state, the national debt – to overcome or traverse what it cannot solve. In thinking through the connection between the “so-called primitive accumulation” and the formation of the nation-state, let us pay close attention to a famous passage from Marx:

The specific economic form (*Form*), in which unpaid surplus labour is pumped out of direct producers, determines the relationship of rulers and ruled (*Herrschafts- und Knechtschaftsverhältnis*), as it grows directly out of production itself and in turn, reacts upon it as a determining element. Upon this, however, is founded the entire formation of the economic community which grows up out of the production relations themselves, thereby simultaneously its specific political form (*Gestalt*). It is always the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers – a relation always naturally corresponding to a definite stage in the development of the methods of labour and thereby its social productivity – which reveals the innermost secret (*innere Geheimnis*), the hidden basis of the entire social structure (*verborgene Grundlage der ganzen gesellschaftlichen Konstruktion*), and with it the political form of the relation of sovereignty and dependence, in short, the corresponding specific form of the state. This does not prevent the same economic basis – the same from the standpoint of its main conditions – due to innumerable different empirical circumstances, natural environment, racial relations, external historical influences, etc., from showing infinite variations and gradations in appearance, which can be ascertained only by analysis of the empirically given circumstances (*empirisch gegebenen Umstände*).⁷⁹

These “empirically given circumstances” furnish us with capital’s “factual” limits, limits linked to capital’s volatile “composition” (in the sense that Negri and others have given to “class composition”). This indicates the whole logic by which the mechanisms of capital and the state attempt to effect a specific logic of the social dimension of separation (*Trennung*), but this “separation” is something profoundly different than the theory of alienation. It shows that where capital has “forced” an amalgam, has forced a mechanism of ordering, there is a “slippage” or “décalage.” Where the amalgam seems most perfectly sutured is also where this décalage can be raised as a social antagonism

⁷⁹ K. Marx, *Das Kapital*, Bd. 3 in *MEW*, Bd. 25, 799-800; *Capital*, vol. 3 in *MECW*, vol. 37, 777-778.

and transformed into a *political* contradiction. The sublime perversity of the capitalist mode of production is expressed in its need to internalize, to capitalize, its violent exterior, to include within its “count” the “uncountable” and savage process of primitive accumulation, recoded as the apparatus of the national debt. The paradox is however that it is human beings, the debtors, who are transformed into a permanent reserve of debt, yet hold a social power over capital, by occupying the position of the “guardians” (*Hütern*), the “bearers” (*Träger*) of labor power, the location of capital’s “original sin,” its primal debt, a question to which we will shortly arrive.⁸⁰

In linking together the transition to capitalism and the emergence of the nation-state, we ought to remember an important point of Marx, related to the well-known formulation that communism is the “real movement that abolishes the present state of affairs,” a familiar reference that has been recently revived in a number of discussions,⁸¹ Although this point is an exceptionally important one, we might instead appeal to another brilliant moment in *The German Ideology* that directly links together the two points we have attempted to locate in the concept of primitive accumulation:

In history up to the present it is certainly an empirical fact (*eine empirische Tatsache*) that separate individuals have, with the broadening of their activity (*Tätigkeit*) into world-historical activity, become more and more enslaved under a power alien to them, a power which has become more and more enormous and, in the last instance, turns out to be *the world market (in letzter Instanz als Weltmarkt ausweist)*. But it is just as empirically established that, by the overthrow of the existing state of society by the communist revolution and the abolition of private property which is identical with it, this power will be dissolved. [...] Only then will the separate individuals be liberated from the various national and local barriers (*nationalen und lokalen Schranken*), be brought into practical connection with the material and intellectual production of the whole world and be put in a

⁸⁰ See in particular chapters 4 and 5 on the analysis of the labor-power commodity.

⁸¹ See in particular, A. Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis* (London: Verso, 2010) and B. Bosteels, *The Actuality of Communism* (London: Verso, 2011). See also the discussion in Gavin Walker, “The Dignity of Communism: Badiou’s Communist Hypothesis” in *Socialism & Democracy* 25:3 (London: Routledge, 2011), 130-139.

position to acquire the capacity to enjoy (*Genußfähigkeit*) this all-sided production of the whole earth (the creations of man).⁸²

This “empirische Tatsache” of the world of capital, linked above to the “empirically given circumstances” within which capital attempts to make its most “fatal leap” between the logical topology and the historical cartography, lays the groundwork of “facticity” or “factuality” in the historical world, the “given” that is implied in this “empirische.” Primitive accumulation, in the final analysis, is a *formal* moment that shows us the birth of the *form* of the labor power commodity – and it is this form that provides capital with its *globality*, precisely the reason that Marx brings up here the “world market”. This globality stems from the fact that labor power cannot be considered a social form restrained by various “national” traits or borders – rather, from capital’s point of view, it is simply the basic form that the “natural resources” of the entire globe take. Here, we should say that this is why the national question is always returning to us, why the debate on Japanese capitalism is so critical: capital discovers its globality precisely through the emergence of the labor power commodity, a commodity whose violent and brutal birth was the hallmark of modernity, but this commodity cannot be “produced” in the indirect way that capital must undertake it, without the form of the nation. The form of the nation has been, since the advent of the capitalist mode of production, the primary device or mechanism through which to generate a seemingly “natural” process of referral between the worker’s body and the body of the state. Yet, and this is the most perverse and complex problem to explain – the manifestation of capital’s *sublime perversion* – insofar as the nation-form thus allows for the birth of the labor power commodity, which in turn, furnishes the basic *global* element of the systematic order of modernity that will become

⁸² K. Marx, *Die deutsche Ideologie* in *MEW*, Bd. 3, 37; *The German Ideology* in *MECW*, vol. 5, 51.

world capitalism, the world itself *as the world of capital* is weirdly therefore, *a product of the nation-form*, itself a kind of trace-effect of the process of enclosure or capture. But what this reminds us of is an essential truth that Marx alerted us to in the analysis of the so-called “primitive accumulation” – *this* world, as the aggregate product of the various nation-states, is a world of capital, the world of the labor power commodity, not *our* world. This is once again why we must never confuse the world of capital with the *world as a project*, as a political goal. Capital’s world, the world of “globalization” and so forth, is precisely an attempt to form a world on the basis not of the immense heterogeneity of bodies, words, affects, sounds, movements, intensities, and so on, but rather a world of absolute sterility and simplicity: a world formed from the singular global raw material of labor power. Here, therefore, we must mark a transition and enter more deeply into what exactly the labor power commodity is, a problem that we have been circling around up to this point. Our guide on this point will once again be Uno Kōzō, and we will see, in the following two chapters, precisely why Uno’s distinctive philosophy of the labor power commodity emerges as a transversal intervention in the debate on Japanese capitalism, that is, we will see how the labor power commodity is always linked perversely to the national question. As an introductory or transitional statement, the problem could be summed up as follows, in a brilliant analysis by Shibagaki Kazuo, one of Uno’s influential students:

The *globality* of capitalism, achieved through the commodification of labor power, nevertheless possesses certain limitations that are derived from this same commodification itself, a process that furnishes its own social basis, limitations that are fundamentally linked to its *actual particularities*. As is well known, while the commodification of labor power is, broadly speaking, the process through which social reproduction is completely transformed in commodity-economic terms, as something that cannot itself be freely produced by capital, it also provides the ground for the basic contradictions of capitalist society, a form of

society always immanent to the relation between capital and wage labor. This is the point on which capitalist society must repeatedly traverse the possibility of its own self-negation in the form of regular and cyclical crises, the phenomenal appearance of its historical limits. Insofar as labor power is bought and sold and exchanged as a commodity, a market for it, that is, a *labor power market*, must be formed, and therefore, the labor power commodity is an entity or object that is always linked to the personal characteristics of the human being inscribed with various historical, cultural, and racial particularities and specificities. Thus, in order for labor power to be transformed into something that could be freely produced and mobilized when needed by capital, as in the case of money and all other commodities, *it had to be formed within limitations established on the basis of the boundaries of area or regional boundaries (chi'ikiteki ni kagirareta genkai no uchi de shika keisei sare'enakatta)*.⁸³

Why does the labor power commodity thus *require* something like “area,” or more broadly, technologies of belonging linked to the worker’s *body*? In pursuit of this question, we will now go further in depth into Uno Kōzō’s work, undertaken against the backdrop of the debate on Japanese capitalism.

⁸³ Shibagaki Kazuo, “Shihonshugi no sekaisei to kokuminsei,” originally published in *Shisō*, no. 499 (January 1966). Republished in Shibagaki, *Shakai kagaku no ronri* (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1979), 83-85. Shibagaki’s text is a critical development of Iwata Hiroshi’s important work on world capitalism, published principally in his *Sekai shihonshugi* (Tokyo: Miraisha, 1964). For reasons of topicality, I cannot extensively expand on certain specific points here that are ripe for theoretical development, so I would simply like to note that I will take another opportunity to revisit this exceptionally important and relatively ignored text. One point that should be mentioned is the political context of this discussion: for Iwata, one of the most important Marxist theoreticians among the new left of the 1960s, the fact that capitalism must necessarily become *world* capitalism implied the necessity of a theory of *world* revolution, that is a simultaneous or chain-reaction of revolutionary uprisings aimed at the overthrow of world capitalism on a *world* scale. This, of course, was posed against the concept of a revolutionary movement in “one country,” as in the historical concept of “socialism in one country.” What is significant to note here is simply that the wide diffusion of this concept of world capitalism amongst the revolutionary left of the time in Japan shows us the exceptional power of Uno’s thought, which furnished the backdrop to these political questions. In turn, the question of capital’s *world* scale and *national* scale was precisely the centerpiece of the debate on Japanese capitalism, which returns time and time again to the fore in Japanese postwar intellectual life.

3. Labor Power and the *Nihil* of Reason: Capital's Threshold

Socially necessary (and therefore *ipso facto* abstract) labor is also a reality, an aspect of the ontology of social being, an achieved real abstraction in real objects, quite independent of whether this is achieved in consciousness or not. In the nineteenth century, millions of independent artisans experienced the effects of this abstraction of socially necessary labor as their own ruin, i.e. they experienced in practice the concrete consequences, without having any suspicion that what they were facing was an achieved abstraction of the social process; this abstraction has the same ontological rigor of facticity as a car that runs you over.¹

– G. Lukács

S. Czerkinsky: What precautions should be taken when producing a concept?

G. Deleuze: You put your blinker on, and check in your rearview mirror to make sure another concept isn't coming up behind you; once you've taken these precautions, you produce the concept.²

To begin this chapter, in which we will expand on the specific question in Uno's work of *labor power*, we must first note, in an (un)happy coincidence, the figure of the automobile as the vehicle of thought and the production of concepts (Deleuze), but also as the concretization of the historicity of abstract labor (Lukács). To productively misread this point in an attentive manner would not reveal this figure to be merely a rhetorical gesture, but rather an indication of the degree to which the automotive industry is a concretization of thought itself in capitalist society, the degree to which the car is a

¹ Georg Lukács, *The Ontology of Social Being*, vol. 2: *Marx*, trans. David Fernbach (London: London: Merlin, 1978), 40.

² Stefan Czerkinsky and Gilles Deleuze, "Faces and Surfaces" in *Desert Islands and other Texts* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1996), 282.

personification of the entire set of problems that emerge around the uncanny and bizarre form of labor power, an immaterial or strictly absent substratum that nevertheless furnishes the alpha and omega of the materiality of capitalist society. The automotive industry, as the ideological zenith of U.S. capital, forged in the moment of World War II (and therefore expressing the specifically militarist nature of U.S. finance capital, with Japanese “police-style” finance capital as its dominated or subcontracted junior partner), was not only the key site for the development of Fordist and later Toyotaist management techniques (the “democratic” reorganization of the firm) as means for the recalibration of the accumulation cycle in the face of crisis, contraction, and stagflation, but has also been the front curve or most advanced laboratory in capital’s drive to eliminate the problem of its reliance on labor.³ The auto sector has thus been, from the very beginning, the vanguard testing ground for the development of technical innovations in automation and robotics on the shop-floor level of the production process. What is at stake in automation is not merely something expressing the contingent level of historical development of world capitalism in various sites, but something that gives us a glimpse of the internal uncertainties that ground capital’s seemingly austere indifference to the world in which it has territorialized itself. That is, what should be “taken care of” in capital’s depths (the reproduction of labor inputs that would allow its expanded reproduction), in fact takes place on the surface, and shows capital’s primordial anxiety for the qualitative dimensions of labor. The automobile is a living text that discloses to us three fundamental problems: 1) the irrational and (im)possible materiality of the immaterial non-substance called “labor power,” an “abstraction” in the circulation process with the “ontological

³ See on this point Michel Aglietta’s *A Theory of Capitalist Regulation: The US Experience* (London: Verso, 1979), especially 111-150.

rigor of facticity” in the production process, 2) the contamination of logic and history that capitalist society inevitably-fundamentally produces through the violence of commodification on the savage outside of capital that must be erased or recoded as capital’s interior (the recurrent semiotic overcodings of the heterogeneous outside, which must be imagined as an interiority), and 3) the politicality implied by capital’s inability to reproduce labor power *as a capitalist commodity* and its concomitant reliance on the “law of population peculiar to the capitalist mode of production” (*der kapitalistischen Produktionsweise eigentümliches Populationsgesetz*)⁴ to “indirectly” produce it, opening up the abyssal question of the subject and the project of communism.

So when Uno Kōzō decides to produce the everyday and commonplace term “impossibility” (*muri*) as a concept, he first puts his blinker on by emphasizing the role played by the wage in concealing the employment of labor power as variable capital in the process of production. He reminds us that the circuit we encounter every day depends on something that is not necessarily inherent to it – so he puts his foot down on the gas, pulls into the fast lane, and checks in his rearview mirror (a device called “three levels of analysis” (*sandankairon no hōhō*)) to make sure that “history” in its full Hegelian plenitude isn’t coming up behind him. Nevertheless, further back perhaps than could be seen in this schematic rearview mirror, there was a concept which aimed at the same foundational zone of effects that Uno indicated with the term impossibility: what political

⁴ Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 in *Collected Works of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels*, vol. 35 (Moscow, London, and New York: Progress Publishers, Lawrence & Wishart, and International Publishers, 1996), 626 [hereafter *MECW*]; *Das Kapital*, Bd. 1 in *Marx-Engels Werke*, Bd. 23: 660 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1962), 660 [hereafter *MEW*]. In the 4th German edition, Marx also adds a decisive and more systematic phrasing here, when he mentions “the law of progressive diminution of the relative magnitude of variable capital” (*das Gesetz der progressiven Abnahme der relativer Größe des variablen Kapitals*) in *MECW*, vol. 35, 625; *MEW*, Bd. 23, 660. I will extensively examine this latter question of variable capital, which *overlaps* with, but should not be *conflated* with labor power, in the following pages.

theology called the *katechon*. By tracing a certain trajectory for Uno's thought that is not strictly economic, and pushing it towards the politicality that is implied in its supposedly austere and purely theoretical system, I want to attempt to ask a series of questions. How is the impossibility of the commodification of labor power related to the possibilities of politics today, how does this space relate to the entire field of effects characterizing contemporary capitalism and its reproduction? And how are we to understand the ubiquity of the discourse on the commons at the present moment, a discourse that suffuses so many positions relative to contemporary theoretical work? If we are to believe that the commons represents something of a project that is both possible and desirable, then how and in what ways does this "being in common" enter into and intersect with the contemporary operations of power? In a sense, I attempt here to overlap or cross-fertilize the register of the economic with the literary or the historical, to decontextualize, recombine and "remix" Uno's rewriting of the Marxian program in order to examine the consequences of this "impossibility," an interruption or "interim status report" towards a rethinking of the debate on Japanese capitalism *as theory*.

Threshold: Labor Power as Fold

It is well-known that Marx's analysis of capitalist production demonstrates that capitalism's basic circuit-process (*Kreislaufsprozeß*) relies on or presumes certain basic "presuppositions for its becoming,"⁵ in particular, the commodification of labor power, the formation of an input, a "necessary matter for its life-process,"⁶ through which labor can be utilized in the process of production as a use value. But this zone of exteriority to

⁵ Marx, *Economic Manuscripts of 1861-1863* in *MECW*, vol. 34, 247.

⁶ Marx, *Economic Manuscripts of 1861-1863* in *MECW*, vol. 34, 243.

capitalism's smooth functioning relies on another exteriority to its internal logic: the so-called "primitive accumulation" ("ursprüngliche Akkumulation") that is, the process of the violent expropriation of existing conditions, the process of enclosure and capture. This double exteriority on which the reproduction of capitalist relations of production rests has been widely theorized within the Marxian tradition and in contemporary theoretical work, but its implications for the current moment, for contemporary politics and for the politics of theory itself, are by no means settled – it is on this network of problems that Uno's intervention is most decisive.

In his recent works, Paolo Virno has directed our attention to the problem of labor power at the core of the question of biopolitics; some years previously and in a different contextual space, Gayatri Spivak reinstalled for us an emphasis on the need to "unavoidably grasp" the "special character" of labor power, that is, "its double nature."⁷ Long before the recent theoretical returns to this question, in 1956, after over 30 years of intensive research into Marx's *Capital*, Uno Kōzō argued that he had discovered its theoretical essence, its microscopic expression, in the form of its fundamental "mantra" or pure axiomatic distillation: "the impossibility of the commodification of labor power" (*rōdōryoku shōhinka no muri*).⁸ This "mantra" theoretical concretizes the problem that lurks behind every aspect of capitalist society, the essential and foundational moment that distinguishes Marx's advances in the critique of the political economy put forward by Ricardo, Smith, Quesnay, and others. But what basic problem does this stem from? For

⁷ Paolo Virno, *Il ricordo del presente: saggio sul tempo storico* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1999), 120-141; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Limits and Openings of Marx in Derrida" in *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (London: Routledge, 1993), 108.

⁸ Uno Kōzō, "Shihonron no kakushin" [*Capital's Nucleus*], originally published as the monthly supplement (*geppō*) to the *Marx-Engels senshū* [Selected Works] (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1956), reprinted in *Uno Kōzō chosakushū* [Collected Works of Uno Kōzō; hereafter *UKC*], vol. 11 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1973), 32-34.

Marx, labor power (*Arbeitskraft*) is in general “the embodiment (*Inbegriff*) of those mental and physical capabilities existing in the corporeality (*Leiblichkeit*) and living personality of a human being, which he sets in motion (*die er in Bewegung setzt*) whenever he produces a use value of any sort.”⁹ In other words, it is the total form of the total potential of the embodied human, but a total form that only becomes visible, only itself becomes a question, when this potential is employed to produce a use-value. And yet labor power is something that cannot be produced in the production process as a commodity. For the capitalist circuit of accumulation to operate, the worker must be placed in a position in which he or she is compelled to sell this labor power as a commodity for the reason that he or she is unable, has been made unable, to produce any sort of use value through it. Through a series of external conditions, through the operation of expropriation and capture, this inoperativity is installed in displacement at the heart of this cycle – the most basic and fundamental “possession” of the worker, that is, his or her pure potentiality to produce a use value, is captured as something unusable in private life and is made into a commodity: this point of origin is the repeating loop of capitalist accumulation itself, the pivot or motor-force according to which capitalism founds its narrative of maturation and simultaneously creates the object which is then retrospectively attributed back towards its starting point. Virno has argued that “Labor power does not indicate a circumscribed potentiality – it is the common name for various kinds (*specie*) of potentiality.”¹⁰ These phrases however, do not exactly clarify the problem. “Labor power” seems merely to name this thing or space that is produced in

⁹ Marx, *Das Kapital*, Erster Band in *Marx-Engels Werke* [hereafter *MEW*], bd. 23 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1962), 181; Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 in *Collected Works of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels* [hereafter *MECW*], vol. 35 (New York: International Publishers, 1996), 177. Translation modified.

¹⁰ Virno, *Il ricordo del presente: saggio sul tempo storico*, 127.

corporeal life and outside of the smoothly turning circuit of capitalism as a closed totality. This thing is a name not solely for something that has been usurped by capital, but also a name for all sorts of potentials. The operation of this strange thing can therefore be summed up: “it is only labor power that cannot be a commodity as a product of capital in a purely capitalist society – it is a unique commodity because it is what establishes this purely capitalist society and at the same time can transform into the thing that negates it.”¹¹ But how and in what way is this “thing” formed, created, and maintained? What characterizes this strange relationship wherein we can posit the production of this “thing” only at a conceptual distance?

We have to pay close attention when Marx states that what he investigates is not so much the actual-historical process of the genesis of capitalism (although of course, he addresses this in the form of the social analysis of the period of primitive accumulation), but rather the focus of his attention is *the historical presuppositions for its becoming*, because it is precisely on this point that Uno reveals the fundamental proposition that I attempt to expand on throughout this chapter:

From the beginning, the production process of capital is realized in a general form which no society can avoid, that is, as a *labor*-production process, through the specific circulation-form of capital, and thus from the very outset, there is here what we might call an excess (*saishō kara iwaba muri ga aru*). In the commodification of labor power, that is, in the commodification of this thing that is originally neither a simple product nor one that can be produced as a commodity, this impossibility is constantly passing through (*sono muri ga tōtte iru*). Through the development of capitalistic methods of production, however, labor power comes to be actually commodified, and for this reason can take the form of the labor wage: thus the production process appears as a natural phenomenon through the form of capital realized in the circulation process.¹²

¹¹ Uno, *Shihonron to shakaishugi* [Das Kapital and Socialism] in *Uno Kōzō chosakashū*, vol. 10, 9.

¹² Uno, *Keizai genron* [Principles of Political Economy] in *Uno Kōzō chosakashū*, vol. 1, 134-135. On this passage, see Yutaka Nagahara’s many writings on the term “muri,” now collected in his *Warera kashi aru mono tachi: han-shihonron no tame ni* [We, the Defective Commodities:

That is, he argues simply that “the fact of the commodification of labor power itself constitutes the particularly ‘impossible’ phenomenon of capitalist production.”¹³ What does it mean to operate from the viewpoint of this “impossibility”? As Uno points out, exactly this thing, the labor power commodity, is essentially impossible as a function of its position, torn in two directions at once; yet as a function of its constitutive ambivalence, its elemental slippage, it is precisely that which can be transformed into the “negation” of the entire capitalist circuit of reproduction (at least, to the extent that there could exist a situation in which no supply of labor power existed for the process of production). At the same time, its very existence presupposes a kind of interior complicity with capital, precisely because labor power itself is only called into being, into its full constituted plenitude, as a result of the employment of labor, its use value. Even in his early works of the 1840s, Marx recognized that “capital can multiply itself only by exchanging itself for labor power, by calling wage-labor into life. The labor power of the wage-laborer can exchange itself for capital only by increasing capital, by strengthening that very power whose slave it is.”¹⁴ Uno’s emphasis on the fact that there is always the generation of an excess that is “passing through” (*sono muri ga tōtte iru*) is a way of expressing the fact that the tense non-space of labor power, torn between its deterritorialization (its creation through dispossession) and its reterritorialization (its continual but dislocational reproduction through its employment in production), itself incarnates a space of effects that cannot be grasped as a stable and stationary object.

For an Analytics of Anti-‘Capital’/ism] (Tokyo: Seidosha, 2008), especially 169-181.

¹³ Uno, *Keizai genron* [Principles of Political Economy] in *Uno Kōzō chosakashū*, vol. 1, 138.

¹⁴ Marx, *Wage Labor and Capital* in *MECW*, vol. 9, 214.

Rather it is an undercurrent that is always present in capitalism, in its ability to ground itself, its ability to testify to its own constitution and continuation.

Since labor power cannot exist in separation from the laborer's mental and physical capabilities, it is inseparable from the reproduction of life in the most basic sense. In other words, "For the laborer, the goal of the selling of labor power is the acquisition of the necessary means of subsistence, i.e., the process of $C - M - C'$."¹⁵ Even if we simply "presume" that labor power is commodified from the very beginning, it is still impossible to argue that this initial C itself is produced as a commodity; here, what the laborer attempts to obtain, means of subsistence, are repeatedly-cyclically consumed in order to nourish the body, that is, in order to live. Immediately we are exposed to the vast and aporetic gap between this process of the "production" (an extremely uncanny production) of labor power and the production of any other raw materials that would furnish us with means of production (for example, steel, cotton, wood, paper, etc). From the capitalist's point of view, nothing fundamental on the surface of this process appears any different from the production of any other commodity, but the decisive point is that the means of subsistence, which enable the reproduction of labor power, are themselves purchased as commodities, and their use-value is consumed in order to live: that is, they cannot already exist as *value*. Unlike any other commodity, the value of the means of subsistence that the laborer consumes is not at all converted into and retained as valorized in the form of labor power as a commodity as it appears in the production process. In

¹⁵ Uno, "Rōdōryoku naru shōhin no tokushusei ni tsuite" (On the Specificity of Labor Power as a Commodity) in *UKC*, vol. 3, 487. In Japanese-language Marxist theory, the original German abbreviations $W = Ware$; $G = Geld$, $Pm = Produktionsmittel$, $A = Arbeitskraft$, etc are usually retained, but I have restored these to the standards in English: $C = commodity$, $M = money$, $Mp = means of production$, $Lp = labor power$, $c = constant capital$, $v = variable capital$, $s = surplus value$.

other words, Uno argues, “the exchange process between C' and C is interrupted, not by the production process, but by the consumption process.” Labor power, as we see here simply cannot be produced *directly* as a capitalist commodity, because it must always-already be intersected by another surface or entire phase of capital’s circuit, the consumption process.

This “indirectness” or what we might call the “torsion” of labor power upon itself therefore also shows us the inadequacy of the typical presentation of the labor process in mainstream economics as a purely circulatory process, the process by which money M is transformed into the value of capital or M'. Because this process of $M - C - M'$ is always interrupted by C, which must contain or hold within it the residue of human labor, the value expressed in the form of “labor power” cannot be transferred directly without a process of mediation from M to M'. Even if it appears this way to the capitalist, who purchases labor power *as if* it were a commodity like any other, who consumes or uses up this labor power *as if* it were a commodity input in the production process, labor power is itself “the embodiment (*Inbegriff*) of those mental and physical capabilities existing in the corporeality (*Leiblichkeit*) and living personality of a human being.”¹⁶ Therefore what the form of labor power shows to us is that capital’s essence consists in this “as if,” this fundamental expression of its “putative” or “presupposed” character, because capital *must treat* labor power as if it were any other commodity, and yet this is itself “impossible” because the gaps or interruptions that labor power opens up under capital’s smooth leap from M to M' are irresolvable by capital itself. In other words, it is this first order point – capitalism is a social system in which the fundamental human relation

¹⁶ Marx, *Das Kapital*, Erster Band in *MEW*, Bd. 23, 181; Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 in *MECW*, vol. 35, 177. Translation modified.

absolutely must circulate *only as a thing* that it simultaneously cannot be, which therefore presents itself as a kind of irrationality torsionally recoded as rationality – that Uno described as the *muri* or impossibility of the commodification of labor power.

The value of labor power, like all commodities, is determined by the “socially necessary labor time” required to produce it. But this presents itself as a baffling paradox or cyclical logical moment when we consider the labor power commodity, because already we are projected outside the production process *as such*, into a concentric process: that is, the value of labor power, which cannot be *directly* produced, is here determined by the socially necessary labor time required for the production of the means of subsistence that are required to keep the laborer alive, not the labor time required to produce labor power itself,¹⁷ because this is strictly impossible – how could a “capacity” be produced? This is because in Marx’s terms “labor power exists only as a capacity, or power of the living individual (*nur als Anlage des lebendigen Individuums*). Its production consequently presupposes his existence (*Ihre Produktion setzt also seine Existenz voraus*). Given the individual’s existence, the production of labor power consists in his reproduction of himself or his maintenance (*Erhaltung*). For his maintenance he requires a given quantity of the means of subsistence.”¹⁸ This “presupposition” – the whole economy in Marx of “setzung” and “voraussetzung” which Uno will extensively examine in one of his most important texts – therefore shows us something critical: the individual’s life-existence depends fundamentally on the means of subsistence, which in capitalist society already “presupposes” that the production of this means of subsistence is undertaken by means of the commodity labor power. Thus, the whole issue of labor

¹⁷ See here Uno, “Rōdōryoku naru shōhin no tokushusei ni tsuite” (On the Specificity of Labor Power as a Commodity) in *UKC*, vol. 3, 488-490.

¹⁸ Marx, *Das Kapital*, bd. 1 in *MEW*, bd. 23, XX; Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, *MECW* vol. 35: 181.

power shows us this torsional and recurrent loop, whereby it must be presumed in order to exist, yet the condition of its very presupposition itself presumes that what should be a *result* of the process must somehow be there *at the beginning*.

Thus, the laborer in a capitalist society does nothing but produce the conditions of possibility for the production of labor power as a commodity -- thus, “the accumulation of capital is crucially dependent on the availability of additional labor-power which cannot be produced by capital itself. Labor power, as has been repeatedly stressed, is reproduced within the private life of workers themselves.”¹⁹ This stark statement that labor power is reproduced in “the life of workers,” requires us to look at labor power not simply as a self-evident and available “living labor capacity,” but also in its most contemporary sense: as many theorists have argued, today the primary concern of capitalist innovation is not discovering new ways of increasing the stock of fixed capital for the next cycle, but is precisely the transformation of the creative capacity and private cultivation of the qualitative dimensions of labor power. So what is this thing that is produced in “life” (*seikatsu*), this thing that founds the continual motion of capitalist accumulation and on which this motion depends for its very conditions of existence? Marx will later add to this definition a crucial moment for Uno’s analysis: “Labor power is the form under which variable capital exists during the process of production” (“Arbeitskraft ist die Form, worin das variable Kapital innerhalb des Produktionsprozesses existiert”).²⁰ In other words, labor power comes to exist or is called into life only when it is utilized in the process of production. Prior to its use it is nothing more than a potentiality that is materially absent. In other words, labor power’s existence

¹⁹ Uno, *Keizai genron (Iwanami zensho)* [Principles of Political Economy, Second Version (so-called “Iwanami zensho version”)] in *UKC*, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1973), 76-77.

²⁰ Marx, *Das Kapital*, Bd. 1 in *MEW*, Bd. 23, 616; *Capital*, vol. 1 in *MECW*, vol. 35, 585.

flashes before our eyes in the general formula of industrial capital $[M - C \dots P \dots C' - M']$. That is, given a general abstract sequence of production, an initial sum of money is exchanged for commodities, in this case for two commodity inputs necessary in order to undertake a production cycle: means of production and labor power, so the formula branches at a decisive moment:

$$M - C <_{LP}^{MP} \dots P \dots C' - M'$$

But the paradox pointed out here by Marx is that LP does not exist as something substantial when money is exchanged for it *as* a commodity. Rather, it is retrospectively made to have existed only during the process of production itself. Thus, labor power haunts the circuit $M - C - M'$, incapable of serving as a stable element, but only “putting in an appearance” at the central point of a given sequence of production:

$$M - C <_{LP_1}^{MP_1} \left[\begin{smallmatrix} MP \\ \{\emptyset\} \end{smallmatrix} \right] \dots P \left[\begin{smallmatrix} MP_2 \\ LP_2 \end{smallmatrix} \right] \dots C' - M'$$

Here, we can clearly see that MP_1 and LP_1 , representing C, the initial means of production and labor power purchased with money M, are immediately temporally exposed to a gap – prior to entering the process of production, LP_1 cannot exist as such. Yet it must be purchased as such. Therefore, the “fatal leap” from the form of money into the body of the commodity here is underpinned by the void. There is a moment in which capital’s reproduction, which requires both means of production and sufficient labor power, cannot be assured of the existence of LP_1 , when it is a void element $[\emptyset]$. This is another critical moment of what Uno described as the “impossibility” of the commodification of labor power, this thing that can and must be smoothly circulated, but

that cannot be produced. Yet even when it is smoothly circulated, its existence is “under erasure,” as it were. Two impossibilities that intersect are exposed in the process of production.

But therefore, what operation in a broad sense is this impossibility signifying? Why does Uno choose this word to locate for us the site wherein something is in excess in the situation, wherein something cannot be counted, or accounted for, by means of the existing order of being? This question might be approached as follows: “the commodity labor power, however, has this peculiarity (among others): its value stands in a special relation to the quantity of use value that it represents, namely, the quantity of living labor *unfolded* in its using-up.”²¹ Let me rephrase this economic insight by taking a rhetorical clue from and productively “misreading” what Laibman refers to here as the “unfolding” of labor power in its employment in the process of production. I would like to point out that it is precisely the “fold” itself that Uno indicates with the term “impossibility,” the limit wherein an extensive and planar surface folds into itself, creating a zone whereby its exterior can be posited as an interior. By folding its own logical space back on to itself, the smooth and freely spinning circuit-process of accumulation enables its exterior, that which cannot be accounted for in its own internal workings, to be discovered and nurtured within its interior. That is, this “impossibility” marks a space or “fold” (*pli*) which “redoubles the empty distance from where it comes to us and separates itself from itself, closing in on this distance over which it, and it alone, stands guard.”²²

²¹ David Laibman, *Value, Technical Change, and Crisis: Explorations in Marxist Economic Theory* (New York: ME Sharpe, 1991), 50-51.

²² Foucault, “Le langage de l’espace” in *Dits et écrits* (2nd edition), t. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), 436.

The impossibility of the commodification of labor power is the site of a double “folding” and “unfolding” for capitalism, a zone in which intensities and effects are gathered in this “fold” in order to create a labor power input for the production process outside of capitalism’s “normal” functioning, and these inputs are then “unfolded” through the employment of the use value (labor) of this commodity, whose only use value is precisely to produce other use values. That is to say, this “fold” in capitalism, which Uno called an “impossibility” (*muri*), describes the function of how capitalism is capable of discovering something outside itself, but ensuring that this outside comes to be “posited by it as its own presupposition.”²³

In a broad sense, this space can be understood as a fold in power, the form through which power acts on itself and thereby continues its own chain of effects. By folding something, one takes a plane or surface (a continuous space without depth) and creates an interior out of a single exterior. But this folded interior (something like a pocket or pleat) is not thereby separated from the exterior: rather it is co-extensive and mutually constitutive. That is, this newly created interior is not a “depth” as such, it is a depth of the surface itself. This interior therefore does not pre-exist the exterior from which it was formed, nor is it wholly external to the interior of the exterior itself. That is, this interior is simply formed by the folding back of the surface onto itself. Power operates in precisely this way. Let us consider, for instance, the reign of a sovereign. The sovereign is in a constant process of holding court, attending rituals, meeting inferiors, bestowing judgments, overseeing projects, and so forth. The reason for doing so is that the sovereign’s power stems from being seen – this is somewhat obvious. But more

²³ Marx, *Economic Manuscripts of 1857-58* in *MECW*, vol. 28, 383.

accurately, the sovereign's power stems from something that is essentially useless and inoperative.

In order to guarantee the continuity of these great and terrible powers – to kill, to let live, to care for whole populations, to promote, to wage war, to make law, etc – the sovereign must continuously mobilize his own *glory*. Strictly speaking, however, glory has no purpose; or rather, its purpose is bound up in a complex relationship with power itself.²⁴ Glory is something like the “fold” of power. It is the site wherein power must continuously give to itself an image of itself which then naturalizes or grounds the operation of power in the situation. That is, power can only be seen when it folds onto itself, when it shows forth its figurational character. Power is constantly being exposed to its own impossibility because it is continuously mobilizing something other than itself in order to naturalize its own operation. Similarly (actually it is precisely the same process, not merely a “similarity”), capital's smooth circuit of accumulation is closed, it is not something which requires anything other than what it itself posits. Yet in order to reproduce itself, capital requires labor power, something that it cannot simply produce in the way it produces other commodities. That is, by folding some substratum of the ghostly interior of the worker's body into its sphere, or by encompassing the reproduction of labor power by means of the process of consumption of means of subsistence (already a product of capital) into its own internal circuit, capital creates a mechanism which allows it to posit labor power as something internal to it: this fundamental externality of

²⁴ Giorgio Agamben's recent installment in his *Homo Sacer* series of works is devoted to an analysis of precisely this important question of the necessity of glory for power's operation. See *Il regno e la gloria: Per una genealogia teologica dell'economia e del governo* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 2007). In the Japanese context of the Emperor-system, one of the quintessential techniques that expresses this relation, see T. Fujitani, *Splendid Monarchy: Power and Pageantry in Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

the production process of labor power to the circuit of capital, which must be recoded in the sphere of circulation as internal, is "forcibly coerced" by the consumption process itself so that labor power can be given form in the commodity. Therefore "under this premise, the circulation-form of capital for the first time becomes something in continuous movement."²⁵ This "forcible coercion" should be immediately understood as an exterior in a doubled sense, and it is precisely here that we should recall the contours of the debate on Japanese capitalism, and the problematic of "extra-economic coercion" – rather than imagining that this "extra-economic coercion" is a figure or "emblem" of the incomplete nature of the given social formation's territorialization of the mode of production, we can immediately see that this incompleteness is inherent to capital's logic.²⁶

The essence of capitalism is contained in this "fold," in this effect by which those things that are external and that cannot be produced by it itself are imagined or posited within it as "ready at hand," as available and immediate. Nevertheless, "from the fact that capital posits every such limit as a barrier which it has *ideally* already overcome, it does not at all follow that capital has *really* overcome it; and since every such limit contradicts the determination of capital, its production is subject to contradictions which are constantly overcome but just as constantly posited." That is to say that capital therefore "drives towards its transcendence through itself."²⁷ Here we see the complexity of this fold, the operation wherein capital's self-image, its positing of its own transcendence through its own conditions, becomes the central question. Labor power, as the source of a

²⁵ Uno, "Rōdōryoku naru shōhin no tokushusei ni tsuite" [On the Specificity of Labor Power as a Commodity] in *Uno Kōzō chosakashū*, vol. 3, 497.

²⁶ See chapters one, "Marxism and the Double" and chapter three "The Feudal Unconscious" on this point.

²⁷ Marx, *Economic Manuscripts of 1857-58* in *MECW*, vol. 28, 337.

kind of “primal energy” for capital derived from its inherent “elasticity” (*Elastizität*),²⁸ cannot be truly integrated into the circuit-process of capitalist accumulation, but only posited *as if it were integrated*. This “impossibility” for capitalism is therefore a general problematic of power, a means of indicating something that, while conceptually impossible, is nevertheless the very basis of the reproduction of the social-historical itself. We should remember that this “fold” wherein capital attempts to posit the supply of labor power as if it were an internal operation is nevertheless always phantasmic on a certain level, because “the ‘industry’ producing labor power is not appropriated; labor power is therefore an input of the system but not an output in the relevant sense.”²⁹ The “industry” here is the substratum of energy itself, the unbound and unthinkable field of corporeality, of life which is only partially captured in the process of the political and juridical constitution of labor power that can be commodified. This “industry” or “social factory” that is constantly producing labor power, that is, the zone of energy that reprocesses life-practices and forms them into sequences, is not itself “appropriated” by capital. The role of the state, or of sovereign power, is in attempting to “appropriate” this space to the greatest extent possible, organizing and concretizing the maintenance, the “care,” of this “industry” by means of the investment in life, or biopower. Biopower operates precisely because capital cannot “appropriate” the total circumstances of the reproduction of labor power; instead, power invests itself in a vast array of forms designed to care for and shelter life in order to ensure the consistent and constant supply of labor power which can be commodified. For this precise reason, its unit of deployment is the form of *population*, the limit-situation which allows capital to regulate this object:

²⁸ Marx, *Das Kapital*, bd. 1 in *MEW*, 630; *Capital*, vol. 1 in *MECW*, vol. 35, 599.

²⁹ Laibman, *Value, Technical Change, and Crisis*, 51.

“capital is capable of controlling the regulation of the supply and demand of every commodity other than labor power, the sole commodity whose supply and demand can only be regulated by capital within definite limits. It is thus the basic condition which capitalism must possess and simultaneously indicates precisely its fundamental weakness.”³⁰

The question of this “fold” of power through which capital posits its own supply of commodified labor power is obviously an “impossibility.” That is, capital is always acting “as if” this is the case, even though its own function can be guaranteed only by this mutually constitutive relationship to the outside. This “impossibility,” which names the folding and unfolding of labor power within the process of capitalist accumulation, therefore also marks a distinct topography of problems for the attempt to account for capital’s own “life-process,” its historicity.

For Uno, capitalism itself is not a linear narrative interrupted by various forms of resistance that are strictly external to it, but rather “is something that takes various distorted forms while nevertheless realizing its own internal laws of development.”³¹ This double feature of capitalism – even when it exhibits signs of divergence, distortion, perversion, inversion, etc, *it is still accomplishing its project*. That is, only by understanding the generality and historicity of the forms of capture which inform and buttress the total operation of capital as a circuit-process can we think the possibilities of resistance. For the question of the historical possibilities of addressing this problematic, Adachi Mariko has produced an apt formulation:

³⁰ Uno, “Shihonron no kakushin” [The Essence of Das Kapital] in *Uno Kōzō chosakashū*, supplementary volume, 34.

³¹ Uno, “Shihonshugi no seiritsu to nōson bunkai no katei” [The Establishment of Capitalism and the Process of Disintegration of the Rural Village] in *Uno Kōzō chosakashū*, vol. 8, 42.

The introduction of ‘history’ in Marx encompasses not only its site of connection to capital in the form of the limitations to the supply of labor power, but rather encompasses *the historicity of the impossibility of the commodification of labor power itself*, in other words, history as the outside which must manifest itself in the openings contained within the theory of principle, or the purified logic of capital itself – thus in Marx, in contrast to the classical school, the question is that of *the dynamic transformation of the theory of principle or the inner logic of capital through the pressures exerted by history itself*.³²

This historicity is itself a double outside; it indicates not only the history of the acts of commodification which must be simply presumed from the standpoint of capitalist society as a *fait accompli*, but also the impossibility of this very act of historicization. We cannot effectively historicize or “contextualize” the moment of the impossibility of the commodification of labor power, precisely because we are always arriving on the stage of history after the fold in power has already taken place. This fold in power is constantly being renewed through its temporality, which is inherently retrospectively projected. The historicity of the impossibility therefore, can only be accounted for in yet another dislocational movement, because “a commodity economy can become the general social form only to the extent that social relations that can commodify labor power itself are established.”³³ The impossibility is precisely the hazardous zone that lies on the border of the unthinkable: how can history account for this space that it cannot encounter? History, however, is inescapably there: labor power could never be constituted without the historical accident/precedent that inaugurated the enclosures in the first place, hence we should remember when analyzing capital’s internal insanity, its pure delirium, that even if it coquets as a pure circle with no territorial-historical outside or zone of excess, “there

³² Adachi Mariko, “Arata na keikenteki sho-ryōiki toshite no ‘jinkō’ no mondai” [New Experiential Fields in the Question of Population] in *Marukusu riron kenkyū* [Investigations in Marxist Theory] (Tokyo: Ochanomizu Shobō, 2007), 274, my emphasis.

³³ Uno, “Rōdōryoku naru shōhin no tokushusei ni tsuite” [On the Specificity of Labor Power as a Commodity] in *Uno Kōzō chosakashū*, vol. 3, 502.

are no deliriums that do not involve history before they involve some ridiculous figure of Mommy and Daddy.”³⁴ This is why we must inquire into the actual operation, the conceptual physics operating within this impossibility, and by extension, ask a related question: why does Uno ground capitalist accumulation as a whole within this impossibility, that is, what is at stake in considering this moment of the impossibility as the “underground current” or substratum of the process of capture? And in turn, how can this operation of the impossibility assist us in thinking the question of politics, the question of the commons as a production, in posing for ourselves the possibilities within it for the critical analysis of actuality? Obviously there have been numerous attempts to clarify, develop, and extend precisely what Uno meant by this term impossibility.³⁵ In the present context, I would like to utilize this dense, sedimented, and powerful term to describe the subterranean current of operation at work in the dual segmentation of economy and sovereign power, an undercurrent in which the hazardous space of capture opens and exposes certain “emblems of its limitations.”³⁶

³⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, “Capitalism and Schizophrenia” in Guattari, *Chaosophy: Texts and Interviews, 1972-1977*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer (New York: Semiotext(e), 2009), 58. The natural point to expand here would be not to take their bait and engage in this pointless psychoanalytic provocation, but instead to remix and re-route this important aphorism to the analysis of what Tosaka Jun called “family-ism” or capital’s cyclically recurring fetish for “home and hearth” as the key technique in the reproduction of labor power. Of course, “Mommy” and “Daddy” also indicate the t(r)opology of land (“Mommy”) and capital (“Daddy”) who cannot pretend that history didn’t precede their particular demented conspiracy of on the one hand, patriarchy and the nation-state (the reproduction of labor power) and on the other hand, the forcible coercion or violence of money and commodities (the smooth circulation-world superimposed on our world).

³⁵ In addition to Nagahara’s afore-mentioned *Warera kashi aru mono tachi*, I “should” also mention Aoki Kōhei, *Komyunitarianizumu e: Kazoku, shiteki shoyū, kokka no shakai tetsugaku* [Towards Communitarianism: Social Philosophy of Family, Private Property, and the State] (Tokyo: Shakai Hyōronsha, 2002), 146-151; Aoki Kōhei, *Komyunitarian Marukusu: Shihonshugi hihan no hōkō tenkan* [Communitarian Marx: The Turning Point of the Critique of Capitalism] (Tokyo: Shakai Hyōronsha, 2008), 187-196.

³⁶ Marx, *Economic Manuscripts of 1857-58* in *MECW*, vol. 28, 425.

The impossibility of the commodification of labor power shows us in concentrated and dense detail that this space is a zone of effects in which power tears away from itself while simultaneously fixing and sustaining a foothold within its own “tearing away.” In other words, “by incorporating into itself the two primary creators of wealth, labor power and land, capital acquires a power of expansion that permits it to augment the elements of its accumulation beyond the limits (*Grenzen*) apparently fixed by its own magnitude, or by the value and the mass of the means of production, already produced, in which it has its being (*Dasein*).”³⁷ The *Ur-Akt* by which capital exceeds its own limits, in which it secures its being, is the unthinkable historicity of the impossibility itself. It is an outside, but an outside that is always-already being folded into itself, thereby forming an interior, and simultaneously being unfolded through the production process wherein its use-value component suddenly isolates and illuminates the silhouette of the absent body of labor power – the impossibility names exactly this threshold wherein the fold of power is occurring as a pure intensity.

Labor Power as Sacrifice: Production-Surface and Circulation-Surface

In *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum*, Carl Schmitt utilizes a certain term derived from the Apostle Paul’s *Second Letter to the Thessalonians*, to describe the force which both “restrains” and “enables” the Empire: what he refers to as the “*katechon*” (κατέχον), the force of “restraining,” “holding back,” “preventing,” and so forth. This term originates in the *New Testament* –

³⁷ Marx, *Das Kapital*, Erster Band in *MEW*, 630-631; *Capital*, vol. 1 in *MECW*, vol. 35, 599. We should note here the essential but implicit reading of Hegel's Logic here. See Uno's schematic of this point in Figure 3.

it is “that which holds the Anti-Christ at bay,” that which prevents the inevitable process of the Apocalypse from occurring. But this “restraint” is at the same time, that which allows the present period to continue, something which, by restraining the appearance and spectacular cataclysm of the end, sustains the continuance of the current moment. Schmitt’s re-reading of this term focuses on the aspect of maintenance implicit within it, its double nature: that is, this force of “restraint” associated with the end of the world, the implosion of the cosmic order under the force of its own productions, is paradoxically what enables the power of the Holy Roman Empire, what allows it to spread everywhere, to suspend all previous arrangements and ceaselessly territorialize itself without limits. Schmitt thus argues that it is only within this ultimate limit (*katechon*) that the limitless sovereign power of order can operate. That is, the Empire posits its own end, the apocalypse, in the form of the Antichrist, the figure who heralds this end. Yet at the same time, precisely in deploying this figure of the end, the Empire strengthens itself, ensures the stability of its power, and through its glory continuously expands and encompasses new elements. Thus, the *katechon* describes the impossible force, the impossible site of power wherein that which “restrains” and displays the Empire’s end also serves as the source of its reproduction and expansion.³⁸ The potency contained within this space is an energy, one derived from the power generated in every act of capture and integration. Every form of capture both undermines itself (by relying on that which lies outside its body) and at the same time is enabled by this undermining (because without an exterior, development, expansion, contraction, etc, in short, *dynamism* would be impossible).

History itself as a continuity is the tracing of a line according to which this dynamics of

³⁸ See Carl Schmitt, *Der Nomos der Erde im Völkerrecht des Jus Publicum Europaeum* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1974), 29-30; *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum*, trans. G.L. Ulmen (New York: Telos Press, 2003), 59-60.

power operates, the sequence of slippages and dislocations according to which assemblages are concatenated and redeployed.

In order for God to be fully manifest, fully present, this *katechon*, that which restrains and enables, must be removed. Only when this force of restraint is excised from the social can the end (or beginning, the Apocalypse) truly occur. Thus, paradoxically, this tension that arises is precisely what sustains the situation, and therefore we have to consider the *katechon* to be “the historical category par excellence” precisely because it is the most basic “descriptive concept of the true mode of being of history,”³⁹ caught between these poles. It is through the notion of the *katechon*, which plays a critical role in Schmitt’s thought, that he re-reads the question of sovereignty as one of political theology – that is, not merely how power sustains itself, but how legitimacy is given to it from within the contours of its own deployment. Hence, “through this idea, Schmitt links theology with politics; legitimacy comes to politics from the theological. It is as a function of the *katechon* that politics is incarnated into a theology of history, and this is where it acquires its legitimation.”⁴⁰

We ought to recognize quickly that this concept (a concept in the strong sense, that is, an actual-material force) names and marks similar operation that Uno referred to as the impossibility (*muri*) in his rewriting or overcoding of the basic Marxian schematics. What capital’s drive is always pushing towards is the removal of this impossibility, the creation of a circuit of reproduction in which no outside, no space of slippage remains. Yet at the same time, capital’s modality of reproduction depends

³⁹ Montserrat Herrero López, *El nomos y lo político: La filosofía política de Carl Schmitt* (Navarra: Ediciones universidad de Navarra, 1997), 420. I was alerted to this text by Bruno Bosteels’ “The Obscure Subject: Sovereignty and Geopolitics in Carl Schmitt’s *The Nomos of the Earth*” in *South Atlantic Quarterly* 104: 2 (Spring 2005), 295-305.

⁴⁰ López, *El nomos y lo político*, 422.

precisely on the multiplication of its encounters with this impossibility, because in order to guarantee the continuing presence of labor power, capital will have to continue capturing, sustaining, and commodifying something that is external to it. Of course, “life itself,” if we can even use this term, is not something *entirely* external to capital – rather, we might say that life is *immanent* to capital but capital does not have access to this life directly, “ready at hand” (*zuhanden*). Capitalism, in essence, is a systemic and total force, a closed cycle without limits, but this cycle’s very existence and operation are enabled only by a fundamental outside, that is, the existence of sufficient inputs of labor power, as well as the existence of excess labor power that can be employed in future rising levels of production. What is at stake here is precisely the impossibility, the power which suffuses and permeates the “outside,” which indicates the end or limit of capitalism as such, the self-generated limits capitalism creates for itself, and at the same time, it is precisely *through* this energy that capitalist accumulation can appear as a smooth and expanding circuit-process. That is, it is only through the impossibility (*katechon*) or exception that the foundations of the normal operation of order are encountered and formed.

In his most recent writings, Virno has also taken up the problematic of the *katechon* in order to clarify and extend his discussion of the politics of the multitude. His discussion, however, attempts to discuss the *katechon* from the other side of the equation, that is, for Virno, the *katechon* is the most central concept which the multitude itself must learn to deploy in practice. He conceives of this function as one which “resists the pressure of chaos by adhering to chaos, just as the concave adheres to the convex.”⁴¹ That is, although it is something that posits the end, the dissolution of all social forms into a

⁴¹ Virno, *Multitude Between Innovation and Negation*, trans. Isabella Bertolotti et al. (New York: Semiotext(e), 2008), 56.

primal chaotic state of Apocalypse, simultaneously, it enables the continuation and sustenance of a given situation precisely by this positing of chaos. The *katechon* (impossibility) is in essence not specific to its use in political theology, but rather “a ubiquitous and pervasive property, perhaps a bioanthropological constant,” something that forms the general undercurrent of various forms of power in social-historical life. In fact, he equates “the concept of *katechon* with the apotropaic function innate in any political (and nonpolitical) institution,” a way of naming this space whereby power gives to itself its own justification by paradoxically positing its own powerlessness through its need for an external emblem or ritual to legitimate itself. It is something containing an “internal antinomy,” a “double bond” of commandment, which Virno effectively sums up in the phrase “I command you to be spontaneous!” That is, the *katechon* is what keeps the situation moving, revolutionizing itself, forming adaptations and shifts, “it safeguards the state of oscillation and its persistence as such.”⁴² In other words, it is precisely the impossibility of the commodification of labor power, folded back into the circuit-process of accumulation, which “safeguards” and guarantees the smoothness of the cycle itself. Only by admitting this outside, but admitting it “as if” it were something generated and posited from within, can capitalism legitimate itself and spur on its self-revolutionizing movement of transformation.

Virno’s reason for taking up this term today is his suggestion that the “*katechon* is the institution that best adapts itself to the permanent state of exception” that the world order is experiencing. He poses this conception of the *katechon* against Schmitt’s reading, which he accuses of merely being deployed as a legitimization of authoritarianism. This wager, in essence, is that the *katechon* is a political institution of the multitude, one

⁴² Virno, *Multitude Between Innovation and Negation*, 59-61.

whose essence is the action and discourse of the multitude. But I think we need to acknowledge that the *katechon* (impossibility) is something ubiquitous, the zone of energy in which that which heralds the end is also that which sustains what is ending. This *katechon* indicates the unthinkable space in which capitalism creates its own “gravediggers,” and yet it is precisely through this creation of its own conditions of destruction that capitalism spurs on the progressive movement of its accumulation cycle. But how does this *katechon* (impossibility) come to actually function in social-historical life, that is, what form does it take? The impossibility names an unapproachable, unthinkable space which encompasses power’s tendency to “fold” itself inwards onto itself, to deploy that which it cannot control “as if” it is controlling it.

This is where Uno locates the form of population – we must remember the second or dependent phrase of Uno’s introduction to the “muri” or impossibility of the commodification of labor power, the paradox that, although this commodification *should* be impossible, in capitalist society “the impossibility is constantly passing through (*sono muri ga tōtte iru*).”⁴³ We will see how this “passing” operates by means of two detours. It has been widely remarked on that Foucault’s analysis of the term population, although filled with rich insights, does not necessarily draw a clear theoretical relation between “population” and “biopower,”⁴⁴ nor does it adequately develop the political consequences

⁴³ Uno, *Keizai genron* [Principles of Political Economy] in *UKC*, vol. 1, 134-135.

⁴⁴ Despite the important investigations of Foucault on this point, I am not convinced of the political importance or even necessity of the widespread discussion of “biopolitics” today as something new or recent. As we can see in the absent torsion of labor power upon itself in the process of production, the investment of capital into life was the original wager or “throw of dice” at the outset of the modern era. But “life” itself is not the site of politics, because the form of “reification” of the human as a political derivation from the “commodification” necessary for the circulation of capital requires the abstraction of something from the pure ground of life and in this sense is always simply the outside/reserve of the “economically given social period,” which is the only site of politics.

of this relation. That is, why does the operation of biopolitics in contemporary capitalism specifically necessitate the form of population? Biopower, the investment of life into governance, is a sequence of operations, functions, and intensities which delegates into various existing spaces the control and calibration of the smooth functioning of domination. This occurs not strictly through dispossession, oppression, and so forth, but rather through the formation of investments, the direction of desires and affective sensibilities, the deployment and management of operations of identification and comfort. That is, biopower can be distinguished precisely by its tendency of insinuation, its effect of managing its own outside by conceiving of and deploying assemblages capable of regulating even those things which are strictly speaking not “ready at hand” for it. In other words:

Capital is something that cannot directly produce the labor power commodity, but through the formation of the relative surplus population in its accumulation process, *it can indirectly produce it*, so to speak. Thus capital gains a method of releasing the supply of labor power from the limitations of the given natural population: the development of what Marx referred to as the special character of the law of population in capitalism. This is precisely the fundamental basis through which capitalism makes itself into a specific form of society. This is why the “historical and moral factors” contained in the determination of the value of labor power must be formed in such a way as to be commensurable with capitalist production.⁴⁵

That is, in order to control and maintain something which it in fact cannot control, capitalism forms a means of producing the labor power commodity “as if” it were, in fact, under its direct jurisdiction. What it requires is a form of delegation that can formulate social-historical institutions capable of inciting forms of the “historical” and “moral” aspects of the field of life (from which labor power is drawn) that are “suitable” for capitalism’s own reproduction. Thus, capitalism’s specific form of population is a

⁴⁵ Uno, “Rōdōryoku no kachi to kakaku” [The Value and Price of Labor Power] in *UKC*, vol. 4, 132.

complex aggregate of techniques that are overlaid like a grid on the existing “natural” stratum of bodies, words, physiognomies, affects, desires, etc, which recalibrates and reformulates them as “countable” or “computable” by capital as inputs for its circuit-process.

Capitalism turns all products into commodities – it turns labor power itself into a commodity as well, but it cannot produce this labor power *as a commodity by means of capital* (*shihon ni yoru shōhin toshite seisan suru koto wa dekinai*). As a result, in order to completely commodify labor power (*kanzen ni shōhinka suru tame ni*), capital requires the industrial reserve army. *Yet, unless this industrial reserve army is formed by capital itself, capitalism cannot posit the social foundations of its own establishment as one historical form of society.*⁴⁶

That is, capital is repeatedly exposed to its inability to produce the foundations its own order. Yet, without in effect “convincing itself” of its possibility to generate its own outside, capital cannot expand, because its expansion presumes the availability of labor power, which in turn presumes the industrial reserve army effect. Capital can give form or direction to the relative surplus populations that appear in the territorial domains of capital’s manifestation, but the industrial reserve army effect paradoxically presupposes that wage labor, and therefore a working population, exist. Because of this presumption, the excess population that would guarantee capital’s ability to act *as if* it were capable of producing labor power directly, is a *result* of capital’s untraceable “beginning” (*Anfang*), which should always logically precede the ordering of the population. But if capital therefore presumes this *Anfang*, it must silently or magically repeat the beginning over and over again every time the circuit C – M – C’ reaches its end. This “countable” or “digestable” aspect of the beginning which must presuppose itself is precisely what results from capital’s need to “fold” back this process into itself, to posit the external

⁴⁶ Uno, “Rōdōryoku naru shōhin no tokushusei ni tsuite” [On the Specificity of Labor Power as a Commodity] in *UKC*, vol. 3, 497.

limits imposed on it as if they were imposed from within itself. What capital itself produces is not labor power, but rather assemblages or mechanisms (*kikō*) that “transmit” or “allow through” (*tōsu*) the effect of the impossibility, this folding back into itself. We will develop this specific sense of “apparatus” in more detail in the following chapter. It is no accident that the term Foucault uses to describe how power directs, manages, and organizes the specific form of population is exactly the same as this “transmission”: it “guides” or “conducts” (*conduire*) the formation of the “historical” and “moral” elements of social life by means of this form called “population.”⁴⁷

In order to clarify this, let me take a short detour to 1968, when Mita Sekisuke criticized Uno’s “conception of capitalism as ‘impossible’” (*shihonshugi o ‘muri’ to miru kangaekata*).⁴⁸ Although Mita’s critique is not particularly interesting for its own theoretical merit, it is an excellent site from which to clarify Uno’s use of the term “impossibility” in order to distinguish its specificity from possible misreadings. Essentially, Mita argues that Uno commits two theoretical errors: first, for Mita, the commodification of labor power is simply the “prerequisite” (*zentei*), the “mere foundation” (*tan naru kiso*) of capitalism, but the essence of capitalism is contained not within this mere exterior condition, but rather in the institution of the production of surplus value, and the forms of exploitation that support this production. Thus for Mita, the commodification of labor power does not indicate any fundamental contradiction for capitalism, but merely something that can be phenomenologically bracketed, something

⁴⁷ See the lecture of March 1, 1978 in Foucault, *Sécurité, territoire, population: Cours au Collège de France, 1977-1978* (Paris: Seuil/Gallimard, 2004); *Security, Territory, Population*, trans. Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave, 2007).

⁴⁸ See Mita Sekisuke, *Uno riron to Marukusushugi keizaigaku* [Unoist Theory and Marxist Economics] (Tokyo: Aoki Shoten, 1968), 250-255.

which is outside the systematic nature of capitalism itself and therefore neither its essence nor a meaningful point of inquiry.

Secondly, Mita argues, Uno is mistaken on the question of capitalism's inability to produce the labor power commodity: for Mita, it is not the capitalist who desires to produce the labor power commodity, or the workers themselves, but rather the precapitalist slave-master or feudal landlord. That is, he argues that precisely through capitalism's formation of the relative surplus population, capitalism produces not too *few* workers, but *too many*. Therefore, he argues, Uno is incorrect to identify an "impossibility" here, precisely because the commodification of labor power is not the site of the primary contradiction. Continuing in this line, Mita states that the essence of the creation of the labor power commodity through dispossession from the feudal system lies in its creation of "owners," those who "own" their labor power, and who are therefore not mere slaves. Thus he states, "this is not an 'impossibility', but rather simply a necessary point of passage in the progress of humanity."⁴⁹ He continues:

We must recognize that the fact that capitalism has continued to develop over hundreds of years demonstrates the continuity of a series of conditions which allowed it to continue. If this is the case, then you cannot prove capitalism's eventual collapse and disappearance by simply pronouncing it an 'impossibility' on the basis of some subjective criteria without clarifying how these conditions that allowed it to continue for so long have been suddenly lost.⁵⁰

Mita's basic claim is that by referring to the commodification of labor power as an "impossibility," Uno therefore considers capitalism to be an absolute "evil," something truly horrific and "unnatural," thereby not grasping the "historically progressive" elements of the rise of capitalism. But this view of Mita's is radically mistaken because it

⁴⁹ Mita, *Uno riron to Marukusushugi keizaigaku* [Unoist Theory and Marxist Economics], 252.

⁵⁰ Mita, *Uno riron to Marukusushugi keizaigaku* [Unoist Theory and Marxist Economics], 252-253.

cannot understand the *tension* established by this impossibility, the fact that what generates the cycle of capitalist accumulation is simultaneously that which restrains it, and that capitalism itself draws its strength from this “restraining,” that is: in the same way that sovereign power draws its strength from its own internal inoperativity, the limits placed on its control by its need to maintain its power through the *katechon*, so too capital paradoxically succeeds in ensuring its own continuance only by positing its own end in the form of the impossibility. Mita thoroughly misunderstands this element of the sustaining force of the impossibility; this impossibility does not merely indicate an internal failing or “unnatural” element of the capitalist circuit, but rather through this term, Uno shows us how it is that capitalism retrospectively “naturalizes” its own outside thereby “predicting” its own end, so that this outside is always folded back into its interior. In other words, through its most basic movement, the employment of labor in the process of production, capitalism folds this impossibility into itself, feeding on the energy of its outside, but an outside that can never be grasped, because it emerges into its phenomenal form only retrospectively.

Capital, in this sense, does not merely rob the outside of its potential in order to spur on its own development. Rather, power in general is always concerned with the act of “sustaining,” “maintenance,” and “care.” The supreme violence of capital is not contained in its actual-empirical acts of violence, but rather in its acts of preservation and security. Capital is consistently concerned with the “industry” that produces labor power – life – and, because it cannot directly appropriate this “industry” or “social factory,” forms and deploys mechanisms which exert control over, and internalize it such that it appears to be an endogenous function:

Capitalism, through the accumulation process of capital which of necessity deploys its industrial cycle, creates a definite quantity and quality of necessary living standards for the reproduction of labor power, internally securing or guaranteeing labor power as a commodity. This is where the special law of population in capitalism lies. Capitalism, by provoking its own crises, secures or guarantees through its own laws the development of new methods of production as well as a laboring population that corresponds to them.⁵¹

Of course, capital's own dream can never quite be realized because it is always maintaining this space of tension which it desperately wants to remove in order to be "fully manifest." This space of the impossibility is in fact where we can find the most fundamental relationship through which power enables itself: power works anywhere in which there is a relation, in which at least two operations mutually implicate and depend on each other, yet cannot be separated precisely because they are mutually constitutive at the same time. In this sense, this impossibility shows to us most clearly the compositional fabric of social being, the hazardous and contingent acts upon which the entire edifice of the social-historical is built. But in order to think the contemporaneity of this problematic for our own conjuncture, we need to ask what this space constitutes politically, whether or not this space can function divergently.

The impossibility itself indicates therefore this operation of the dual folding of the exterior into the interior and the unfolding of the labor power commodity in the process of production. Uno's point is thus not that capitalism is itself "impossible" (as in Mita's reading) but rather exactly the opposite, that capitalism's own inverse, its own mirroring effect in which its fold retrospectively grounds itself, already exists within it, and its systematic strength constantly replenishes its own energy by means of this inner scission. That is, its "normal" operation draws on the "exception" at its core, constantly generating

⁵¹ Ōuchi Hideaki et al., eds. *Uno Kōzō: chosaku to shisō* [Uno Kozo: Work and Thought] (Tokyo: Yūhikaku, 1979), 60.

its own image and folding it back into itself. In other words, “the commodification of labor power on the one hand is constantly shouldering the burden of the autonomy of the capitalist social system through the dismantling of communal relations, while on the other hand, it must at the same time maintain and supplement certain fixed communal relations. It is precisely this point which expresses the intensity of the impossibility.”⁵²

But it is extremely important to not characterize this “impossibility” simply as the “other side” or verso of the smooth circuit of capitalist accumulation, as the “true” or “conclusive” outside. It is true that we must focus on the operation of this zone of effects, that we must “must pass to the other side, but in order to extract oneself from these mechanisms which make two sides appear, in order to dissolve the false unity, the illusory nature of this other side with which we have taken one or the other side. This is where the true work begins, that of the historian of the present.”⁵³ We should remark in passing here that we can cross-reference Foucault’s conception of the history of the present with that elusive possibility that Uno called “*genjō bunseki*” or “conjunctural analysis.”

Foucault continually emphasized the political potential of the event as a strategy of investigation, what he referred to as “eventalization” (*événementialisation*), a technique devoted to the drawing out, or coaxing out of singularity, the internal and constitutive slippage of every discursive formation which forces it to reveal that “it wasn’t all that necessary after all.” It is in relation to this problem of necessity that I want to ask:

⁵² Aoki Kōhei, “Komyunizumu kara komyunitarianizumu e: gendai shakai tetsugaku ni okeru Marukusu, Uno riron no kōzō” [From Communism to Communitarianism: The Structure of Marxist and Unoist theory in Contemporary Social Philosophy] in *Marukusu riron no saikōchiku: Uno keizaigaku o dō ikasu ka* [The Reconstruction of Marxist Theory: How Can Unoist Economics Be Revived?], Itō Makoto and Furihata Setsuo, eds. (Tokyo: Shakai Hyōronsha, 2000), 183.

⁵³ Foucault, “Non au sexe roi” in *Dits et écrits*, t. 2, 265.

what is the meaning-event (*l'événement-sens*) of the ongoing and incessant operation of the impossibility (*katechon*) which limits and yet sustains the operation of power?

Foucault warns us that the consideration of the event requires a “more complex logic,” “a grammar with a different form of organization” (*une grammaire autrement centrée*) – he demands that we remain alert to the fact that the “meaning-event does not localize itself in the proposition under the form of an attribute, but rather is fixed by the verb (*il est épinglé par le verbe*).”⁵⁴ Thus I want to ask: which verb is the impossibility fixed to when we eventalize its conditions of emergence and capture? The impossibility is precisely that space which is never an attribute, never a substance, but is only understandable and graspable to the extent that it is “fixed” by a verb: the impossibility comes into function, shows forth its field of effects, when it is “folded” into capitalism’s range through the mechanism of “population,” and “unfolded” as labor (labor power’s use value) in the process of production. Certainly for Uno, the commodification of labor power is “fixed” to the verb “tōru” or “tōsu” (通る・通す), that is, the “meaning-event” of this commodification is contained precisely in its “passing through,” being “conducted” or “transmitted,” the fact that labor power is an undercurrent of energy that suffuses the situation of production. This effect, that we can encounter this impossibility only when it is “conducted” (*tōsu*) shows us that Uno utilizes this term and his analysis of its operation, to name something that can never be an object that is fully “ready to hand”: rather, the impossibility is exactly what Nietzsche called “the desolate stream of becoming” (*den wüsten Strom des Werdens*).⁵⁵ The way in which this “desolate stream”

⁵⁴ Foucault, “Theatrum philosophicum” in *Dits et écrits*, t. 1, 950.

⁵⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, “Vom Nutzen und Nachtheil der Historie für das Leben,” *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen II* in *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe*, bd. 1 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980), 317.

is always being “folded” into the interior as if it were under the watch and care of power is precisely how commodification can always appear as a *fait accompli*: through its “fixing” by the verb, the impossibility is always occurring as a kind of “eternal present,” that is, the meaning-event of the impossibility “is always both the displaced point of the present and the eternal repetition of the infinitive.”⁵⁶

The eventalization of the capture of labor power creates a “rupture of evidence,” a surging-forth of singularity; it “consists in rediscovering (*retrouver*) the connections, the encounters, the supporting mechanisms (*les appuis*), the blockages, the games of power (*force*), the strategies and so on which, at a given moment, form what will thereafter function as evidence, universality, necessity.”⁵⁷ This eventalization thereby allows us to see this contingent excess generated by capture, but also shows us the chain of relations and dislocations between the historicity of the impossibility and the site of politics proper, which is always the “economically given social period” [*ökonomisch gegebenen Gesellschaftsperiode*].⁵⁸ It is the unstable and chaotic flux of labor power, the excess which is “passing through it,” its undulating dimensions, which is inherent and present in this moment. In this sense, this zone of effects also marks the site where economy and sovereign power cross over each other, where their gradients of power are articulated to each other; it marks the fundamental site wherein we see both the “economic excess/surplus which is integrated into the capitalist machine as the force which drives it

⁵⁶ Foucault, “Theatrum philosophicum” in *Dits et écrits*, t. 1, 950.

⁵⁷ Foucault, “Table ronde du 20 mai 1978” in *Dits et écrits*, t. 2, 842.

⁵⁸ Karl Marx, “Marginal Notes on Adolph Wagner’s *Lehrbuch der politischen Ökonomie*” in *Collected Works of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels*, vol. 24 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1989), 547, translation modified; “Randglossen zu Adolph Wagners *Lehrbuch der politischen Ökonomie*” in *Marx-Engels Werke*, Bd. 19 (Berlin: Dietz, 1962), 371.

into permanent self-revolutionizing” and “the political excess of power inherent to its exercise.”⁵⁹

The Endless Labor of the ‘Original Sin’

As we have seen in the role of the impossibility, primitive accumulation, as a substratum of capture which underlines the existence of social relations under capitalism in which the “original sin is at work everywhere” (*die Erbsünde wirkt überall*),⁶⁰ is not inherently the dispossession of the outside understood unilaterally as the continuity of acts of violence, but is also the process of nurturing and caring for the results of the political and juridical constitution of labor power as a commodity, and the population-form which secures and guarantees its availability:

Capital requires land, and further land ownership, as a precondition outside itself, but demands it in a form appropriate to its own reproduction process. In just the same way, capital cannot create labor power as a product of capital, *but it nevertheless gives birth to an apparatus that secures or guarantees it capitalistically*: the deployment of its law of population. It appears not as something that secures or guarantees capital’s total control in relation to labor power, but rather as *an objective law of movement that must subordinate capital as well*. This is where we see the specificity of the labor power commodity, and in indeed it is the foundation of how capitalist society forms itself into a society precisely through its own principles.⁶¹

Labor, as the use value of labor power, that is, the labor employed in the production process (the image of the primal energy folded back onto itself), fills the space ripped open by the impossibility of its own commodification. To the extent that capital must simply assume the presence of labor power as a commodity, capital is essentially

⁵⁹ Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 298.

⁶⁰ Marx, *Das Kapital*, bd. 1 in *MEW*, 619; *Capital*, vol. 1 in *MECW*, vol. 35, 589.

⁶¹ Shimizu Masanori and Furihata Setsuo, eds. *Uno Kōzō no sekai: Marukusu riron no gendaiteki saisei* [The World of Uno Kozo: Contemporary Reanimations of Marxist Theory] (Tokyo: Yūhikaku, 1983), 239. Emphasis mine.

propelled into and sustained in its life-cycle by an abyssal opening, something that needs to be filled (or more precisely, *needs to be posited as having been filled; it is the grammatical future anterior*). Therefore, from within the already-accomplished movement of capital, the use-value of labor power, which Uno quite rightly theorizes as a “semblance” (*Schein*), steps into the gap and posits its own presence retroactively:

The determination of labor power as a commodity is nothing more than a semblance (*kashō*; *Schein*): the determination of the commodity is given to something which originally cannot be produced as a commodity. Yet this is not *merely* a semblance. Rather, it is the necessary form which constitutes the general basis of the commodification of every product in a commodity-economic society.⁶²

This moment has always-already happened. This is why the impossibility itself is not exactly the direct site of politics, because the impossibility is a grounding force of the order of being in general, and cannot announce itself from the outside: strictly speaking, the impossibility names the place wherein what cannot be produced from within the cycle is produced, but this impossibility is itself covered over by the employment of labor power as a use value, an operation in which this semblance retroactively attributes itself as having always-already been. This is precisely why we never actually encounter the impossibility of the commodification of labor power, but only can identify the ontological gap which is filled by the semblance of labor power. This is why the commons as a political project should never be associated with that which merely exists as a plenitude within the order of being, because it is first and foremost a project, and not a *fait accompli*. All attempts to posit the commons as the holistic, pre-capitalist (or non-capitalist) outside, the romantic and non-complicit supplement, and to substantially

⁶² Uno, “Rōdōryoku naru shōhin no tokushusei ni tsuite” [On the Specificity of Labor Power as a Commodity] in *Uno Kōzō chosakashū*, vol. 3, 495.

demand the empirical-territorial discovery of such spaces, inevitably result in a banal, liberal politics and an abandonment of critique.

The impossibility in essence is that which is always already completing a double movement in its very existence. It is a simultaneous site of restraining or holding back and enabling or opening up. The fact that capital cannot itself produce the additional supply of labor power demanded for progressive accumulation places a restraint on its internal development. But at the same time, it is this basic and fundamental seizure of the “primal energy” that empowers the internal forces and dynamically intensifies capital’s modality of operation. This impossibility therefore names a force that is not simply “two-sided,” because these two operations are not disconnected from each other but mutually reinforcing, internally complicit, and inseparable in terms of their effects. This force of the impossibility encounters heterogeneous sequences and deployments of elements, and attempts to capture them, dispersing their sequentiality and remodeling them in alternate commensurable clusters and assemblages. But equally this impossibility sustains elements, that is, the aspect of “making live” or “caring for” is part and parcel of its violence. This is never simply the “other side” or the “inverse” of the impossibility’s operation, rather the location of the impossibility situates itself in the slash itself between violence/care.

When Foucault exhorts us to not give up on history, to instead dislocate ourselves and our practices towards the breaks, the ruptures, the splits and impasses of that which is taken as evidence of substantiality and necessity, he means something closely aligned to what Uno identified as the impossibility (*muri*). That is, he intends by this formulation to indicate the possibilities of writing histories of the constantly moving undercurrent of the

operation of the “apparatus of capture,” the possibility of writing histories of the improvisationally concatenated zones of intensity generated by this capture. This is why the question of migration, of displacement, of statelessness, is so crucial to new methods of historical inquiry. Such sites do not constitute spaces “free” from capital but rather those spaces that are permanently placed in the gap created by capture, permanently located in the border. This impossibility of history is not a disabling condition but exactly the opposite: paying close attention to the historical formations or “thresholds of intensity” (*seuils d’intensité*)⁶³ that this hazardous space of partial determinacy is passing through is what will allow us to encounter what Althusser called “the continent of history” itself, because we ourselves are always internal to the historicity of the impossibility of the commodification of labor power. We are always internal to the fact that this fold in power is always internalizing the outside: “We are always inside – the margins are a myth. The language of the outside is a dream that one never stops renewing.”⁶⁴ This impossibility can never be approached politically as a substance, but must be understood as a process in which something that is not a substance is transmuted in a retroactive process of substantialization, transforming that which is in flux into irreparable segmentarities. That is, the investigation of the historicity of the impossibility may allow us to develop a form of theoretical inquiry in which we can discover the intimate relation between the line of writing as a practice, and the historical object as the fluctuating energy of the reproduction of “actual life” (*wirklichen Lebens*) – and in turn, only through such a movement can we hope to create new forms of sociality that reject the hegemony of substantiality, spurring us away from “discoveries” and towards

⁶³ Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille plateaux* (Paris: Seuil, 1980), 71.

⁶⁴ Foucault, “L’extension sociale de la norme” in *Dits et écrits*, t. 2, 77.

“productions.” The impossibility is never an object, but always a precarious form of the relations of power, and because every relation itself discloses the work of contingency at its core, this impossibility also points us towards the field of resistance, a resistance to-come that demands an endless and repeating production of the commons. The impossibility is the unstable gathering of the hazard precisely because it is never perfectly clear that capital will succeed in its initial (always already occurring for the first time) operation of capturing labor power. But in my view this space of the impossibility *is not a project*, in the sense of a determined political sequence and its operationalization. It is the site from which we can launch investigations, around which we can attempt to rediscover the “continent of history,” but it alone can never be the project itself because here we cannot find something other than the order of being. This impossibility in fact, is the foundational moment, the gap in the field of social being that capital itself forms in order to fold its external effects back into the internal structure of its reproduction. While we must welcome the impossibility and its hazardous zone of effects, we have to be equally careful not to imagine that this space of the impossibility itself is already a space of immanent freedom. Rather, we need to strategically push deeper into this impossibility, farther down into the depths of its energy in order to redeploy the power of life that it holds in tension for our own project.

Number, Absence, Subject

From the irrationals are born the *impossible* or imaginary quantities whose nature is very strange but whose usefulness is not to be despised.

- Leibniz

When Uno in effect “invented” this term *muri* as a concept, it is not inconceivable that he was thinking of the concept of “irrational number” (*murisū*) in mathematics.⁶⁵ In other words, he was thinking precisely of how the rational structure of the pure world of number – the world of capital’s dream of itself, functioning as an uninterrupted interiority organized by number and the countable – constitutes a congealed level of abstraction that is nevertheless subtended by an “incalculable hazard”. Simply put, the question of irrational number historically indicates the moment at which the hitherto-existing concept of number as an expression of perfection and pure intensity was revealed as unstable. In the sense that this “muri” of capital is an expression homologous with the *murisū* or irrational number of mathematics, what this reminds us of is that capital’s basic wager – the possibility that social relations could be managed as relations among things – in which something unquantifiable must be made to behave as if it were reducible to number, countability, and stability, thus always contains within it an infinite regress: the value of labor power can only be determined by means of the value of the means of subsistence utilized to indirectly “reproduce” it. In turn, the means of subsistence – which would include not only food, clothing, and shelter, but also necessary regimes of training, medical care, education, forms of subjectivation and so forth – must contain or encompass numerous qualitative aspects that exceed or cannot be reduced purely to quantity. Here it should be emphasized that, like all commodities (save labor power and land), the means of subsistence must be produced by its own process of production. This process of production, through which the means of subsistence could be furnished for the

⁶⁵ I owe the initial clue for this formulation to conversations with Naoki Sakai. I would like to take another opportunity to further develop this relation of the *muri* of the commodification of labor power and the concept of ‘irrational number’.

reproduction of labor power, itself requires the labor power input. In this sense, we are already in a preliminary moment of infinite regress. Labor power, which cannot be assumed to be available when it is required, must be reproduced indirectly through the production of the means of subsistence, whose production itself must assume the existence of labor power inputs. This infinite regressive spiral of the logic inherent in the dynamics of capital is identified by Uno: “the exchange process between C' and C [i.e., the passage from one C-M-C' sequence to another] is interrupted, not by the production process, but by the consumption process.” We are returned, therefore, to the ultimate paradox of the subject, a paradox that is at the heart of the problem of capital as a social relation: the problem of continuity. How is it that something which merely masquerades as a substance, something that cannot be assumed to be stable, something that is punctuated at every moment by breaks, interruptions, and contingencies, nevertheless remains in a state capable of subsisting, capable of presenting itself *as if* it were a continuity? What the “muri” or irrational substratum shows us is not that it constitutes the moment at which things break down or cease functioning. The true paradox is that this irrationality is precisely what allows capital to appear as a continuity, as an organizing and perspectival force through which it *traverses* or *passes through* its own boundaries or borders.

In the representation of the subject that would be considered “typical” or “usual,” the subject is understood as a psychic island existing within a field in flux. This field would be outside or exterior to the boundaries of the island, and the island in turn would constitute an inside with regard to itself. Thus the subject would be imagined in this way as something in which interiority and exteriority could be strictly separated. Lacan’s

intervention in the 1950s in Seminar 9 concerns an attempt to provide the theory of the subject with a different topology – a topology of the subject in the shape of the torus or Klein bottle. In other words, for Lacan, this rigid differentiation of inside and outside leads us to incorrectly assume that there is a hard kernel of interiority within the subject that would be the “evidence” or “proof” of the subject’s self-identity. Rather, he argues, because the I as a subject emerges through the “traversing of the primal fantasy,” in which the I as subject of the enunciation is presumed to be identical with the subject of the enunciated, already at the most primal stage of identification, this I would be exposed to some “other” outside its expected boundaries. Since, therefore, this other that is absolutely internal to me is simultaneously exterior to me as a subject,⁶⁶ it follows that the subject can never be a given, but must rather be a production of this splitting, a splitting however, that never appears as a split, but that is smoothly traversed as if the split would never constitute a boundary or gap. This structure of putativity, this “as-if condition,” irrevocably or irredeemably structures the subject, to the extent that we might even say: “the subject” names this simultaneous gap and suture understood in the form of the “as-if.” What is paradoxical, or that gives us pause, is the fact that this form in which the subject must occur is also a description of the microscopic internal physics of capitalist society.

The singularity of the individual must always mark a point of discontinuity in the social field, but this discontinuity can only be represented in the form of the subject. The subject is thus precisely that insubstantial substance that marks the absence of any of its own legitimating traces, a mark on the map of the modern social landscape that indicates

⁶⁶ Here we could recall the extremely important analysis of Tanabe Hajime on the concept of the “self-I” and “other-I” (*jiga* and *taga*). See Tanabe, “Zushiki ‘jikan’ kara zushiki ‘sekai’ e” in *Tanabe Hajime zenshū*, vol. 6, esp. p. 25-27.

a central point of rupture, and yet this point must also paradoxically be the node around which the “smooth” operation of society can function, and it is this paradox that Uno understood in the “muri” or absence of reason, the abyssal and irrational moment essential to capital’s dynamics. In this sense, let me quote at length one of the few times Uno ever discussed something like the concept of “subject”:

The pure theory of capitalism must represent the capitalist commodity economy as if it were a self-perpetuating entity in order to divulge the laws of its motion. It therefore seems to me completely impossible for economic theory to demonstrate at the same time a transformation which involves the denial of those laws. I certainly do not mean that economic theory, for this reason, should assert the permanence of capitalist society... But neither the pure theory of capitalism nor empirical studies of an actual capitalist economy, nor for that matter the stage-theoretical analysis of capitalist development offer *an economic explanation* of the process of the transition from capitalism to socialism. *This is the role of the subject in the organizational practice of the socialist movement* – the practice of this subject is not a process of mere clarification of economic necessity but rather is the utilization of the social sciences, the basis of which is political economy, to the greatest extent possible within the movement... In any case, whether or not the victory of socialism is necessary depends on the practice of the socialist movement itself, and not directly on the economic laws of motion of capitalist society. But with the economic laws of motion, the class-character (*kaikyūsei*) of capitalist society is laid bare, and this throws light on the general economic foundation of the class-character of previous societies, and thus at the same time clarifies the historicity (*rekishisei*) of capitalist society. It is on the basis of this knowledge that socialist movements can scientifically assert the necessity of the transformation of capitalist society.⁶⁷

But what does this “subject” actually indicate here? The dense parallax between the production of subjectivity as a function of the first order “indirect” production of labor power as a *capitalist* commodity, and the “role of the subject in the organizational practice of the socialist movement,” is a tension that underlies the entirety of the Marxist theoretical project. On the one hand the subject must be the concentrated expression of the explosive energy of the masses, wholly contingent on the “evental” nature of politics

⁶⁷ Uno, *Keizai genron (Iwanami zensho)* [Principles of Political Economy, Second Version (“Iwanami zensho” version)] in *Uno Kōzō chosakashū*, vol. 2, 163-164.

(in the sense of “all hitherto existing history is the history of class struggle”⁶⁸), and on the other hand, the subject must somehow simultaneously be the distillation or concentrated product of the transition from the antagonism (*Gegenstand*) between labor and capital to the contradiction (*Widerspruch*) between the development of the productive forces and their corresponding relations of production, and in this latter sense, must therefore be merely the expression or result of this inevitable historical contradiction, just a sign of the metahistorical process itself. This ruptural space, in which the rare or abyssal space of the subject flickers in and out of presence, between the “iron necessity” of capital’s logic, and the “random order of computation” in which capital encounters a pre-existing semiotic and territorial field always exists in a paradoxical or non-verifiable relation to the “reified” human being as political expression of the impossibility of the commodification of labor power. On this essential moment, Slavoj Žižek neatly produces one theoretical response:

For Marx, the emergence of working class subjectivity is strictly co-dependent on the fact that the worker is compelled to sell the very substance of his being (his creative power) as a commodity on the market – that is, to reduce the *agalma*, the treasure, the precious core of his being, to an object that can be bought for money: there is no subjectivity without the reduction of the subject’s positive-substantial being to a disposable ‘piece of shit’. In this case of correlation between Cartesian subjectivity and its excremental objectal counterpart, we are not dealing merely with an example of what Foucault called the empirico-transcendental couple that characterizes modern anthropology, but rather, with the split between the subject of the enunciation and the subject of the enunciated: if the Cartesian subject is to emerge at the level of the enunciation, he must be reduced to the ‘almost-nothing’ of disposable excrement at the level of the enunciated content.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*.

⁶⁹ Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London: Verso, 1999), 157. Žižek here gets the Marxian logic of the *agalma*/shit or “alpha and omega” of capital somewhat backwards: rather than showing us the violent reduction to shit of the ideological veil of the individual endowed with rights and so forth, the capture of heterogeneity and formation of labor power in the process of primitive accumulation or transition from feudalism to capitalism shows us that revolutionary politics and the break with this (im)probable history which is apparently ours, consists in the political potential of our original state of being as shit. That is,

But the subject is precisely that which cannot be grasped as itself. The subject comes to be grasped as itself only in being retrospectively projected back on to its own emergence. That is, the subject is the original “semblance” because paradoxically, it is only discovered and made concrete in the act of admitting its non-identity. That is, when I try to discover myself as a subject, I can discover this, but only in as much as the subject’s existence is guaranteed by the condition of being posited itself. Wherever the subject is posited, there remains the undecidability of practice, a certain impossibility that characterizes its very possibility. Uno in fact identified this operation already: labor power does not exist as such. Labor power is called into being when its use-value, labor, is employed in the process of production. At that point, labor power is retrospectively made to have existed; in other words, its basic temporality is exactly the future anterior (“it will have been”). When capital needs to expand, it presumes the existence of a supply of labor power but it conceals to itself the hazard of securing this supply. It posits for itself a semblance which fills the void and allows the circular logic of its cycle to smoothly continue. We should recognize that this entire schematics shows us something

insofar as we are the spectral substance called labor power which is circulated on capital’s surface, the body, which lies outside the sphere of circulation and is instead in a direct relationship to the production process (mediated by the consumption of means of subsistence), reprocesses these means of subsistence as human waste, and thus is not only conceptually, but concretely in a constant process of “taking a shit” on capital’s supposedly pure interior. By means of this eternal return of shitting, capital must pollute itself, contaminating its laboratory by repressing the fact that this laboratory is one big toilet. Our essence as shit/excess is therefore always-already contaminating the interior of capital’s supposedly “clean” and “sterile” circuit process and it is this weakness the form of labor power discloses. Following this reading, we might “flip the script” on Henri Lefebvre by affirmatively inverting and strategically misreading his declaration that existentialism was simply “the magic and metaphysics of shit,” here reminding ourselves that the metaphysics of shit, as the torsional impossibility present in the labor power form, is exactly the motor-force of the historical process (see H. Lefebvre, *L’existentialisme*, 2nd edition, Paris: Anthropos, 2001, 63). In this sense, what is at stake in the “shit-question” is nothing less than the ontology of social being and its uncanny anterior in the form of labor, the endless loop of the putative “origin.”

critical not only about the way in which capital operates, but about the *production of subjectivity* itself. I would like to therefore argue that the possibility of the commons depends not only on going deeper into the impossibility of the commodification of labor power, but going deeper into what we might call the “impossibility of the subject,” precisely because the entire question of what labor power is, how it is produced, and how it operates “signals the radical *scission* that marks the constitution of subjectivity in capitalism.”⁷⁰

In Uno’s sense, labor power (along with land) are the two elements of capitalist production that can be circulated as commodities, but that cannot be originally produced as commodities. Rather, they must be “encountered” or “stumbled upon” *historically* in order to function *logically*. Already this introduces a rupture or gap into capital’s own image of itself. Further, once capitalist production is established as a circuit-process, capital must continuously utilize the form of the “relative surplus population” to pretend or act *as if* labor power can be limitlessly supplied, in order to expand itself in the form of the business cycle. Therefore, labor power, the pivot or motor-force of capital’s expansion and reproduction, is strictly speaking *absent*, but is mobilized as a trace. Thus, capital extends itself on credit by means of a logical wager with the level of history, a wager on the traces of the body of labor power, which cannot be said to have a stable or substantial existence, but only a presence *as a semblance* of itself.

Therefore, what Uno called the “law of population” is precisely the moment which “allows” the violence of the exterior into the interior, the mechanism or assemblage by which the impossibility can be incorporated into the smooth circuit of

⁷⁰ See here Sandro Mezzadra, “Forces and Forms: Governmentality and *Bios* in the Time of Global Capital.”

accumulation. Numerous tendencies in the history of Marxist theory have tended to treat the question of violence or force as an “externality” for capitalist society, as something “extra-economic” (what Marx called *ausserökonomischer Zwang* or what in Marxist historical writing in Japan was called *keizaigai kyōsei*). But when we examine the field of subjectivation, the role of the “historical and moral factors” that capital requires for its own emergence, we realize quickly that on a semiotic level, capital is always maintaining this violence but recoding its social function in a divergent form or gradient of deployment. The raw violence of the outside is economically recoded as the “natural basis” of the inside, thereby smoothing over violence’s violent appearance by means of yet another violence. This effect of doubling is what enables capital to deploy itself as if it were a totality, to socially organize phenomena around this totality without being able to truly legitimate itself as a completeness.

A commodity economy possesses a discrepancy or site of excess (*muri*) in as much as it treats relations among human beings as relations among things, but it is paradoxically the fact that this site of excess (*muri*) has developed as a form capable of ordering the totality of society that renders possible our own theoretical systematization of its motion.⁷¹

By capital’s incapacity to capture social relations without the violence of reification, capital also opens up the space of politics within its interior. Capital computes the “random order” of events precisely “as if” they constituted a necessary, natural, and self-legitimizing sequence, and then folds this set of effects retrospectively back into its own function in order to ground itself. This “as if” (*als ob*) of capital, in which the hazardous potential of chance is smoothed over in the form of the accumulation cycle is why Uno constantly emphasizes that capital is always something that appears “as if” (*ka no gotoku*)

⁷¹ Uno, *UKC* 4: 1973, p. 19.

it is a perfect cyclical self-contained object in motion. The seeming double-bind contained in the violence of the indirect “production” of the labor power commodity, whose social-historical origins lie in Marx’s discussion of the so-called “primitive accumulation,” might appear to disable any conception of political intervention, to be a closed circle, but we could also say Uno show us precisely the opposite.

Capital, as the fundamental concretization of social relations, and therefore as the apex of the social relation’s violent verso, cannot rid itself of this fundamental “condition of violence” (*Gewaltverhältnis*),⁷² located in its logical alpha and omega, the labor power commodity, whose “indirect” production is located paradoxically outside commodity relations. An excess of violence is haunting capital’s interior by means of this constantly liminalizing/volatilizing forcible “production” of labor power. Precisely by this excessive violence, capital endangers itself and opens itself up to a whole continent of raw violence, and it is exactly on this point that Uno’s work shows us something important in terms of the question of how capital utilizes the “anthropological difference” to effect the “indirect” production of labor power.

The primal violence, sustained as a continuum or “status quo,” appears as a smooth state, a cyclical reproduction cycle without edges. But this appearance or semblance of smooth continuity is in fact a product of the working of violence upon itself: violence must erase and recode itself as peace *by means of violence*. In other words, when we encounter the basic social scenario of capitalist society, the exchange of a product for money, we are already in a situation in which the raw violence of subjectivation, whereby some absent potentiality within the worker’s body is exchanged *as if* it is a substance called labor power which can be commodified, is covered over by

⁷² Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 in *MECW*, vol. 35, 609.

the form of money, which appears as a smooth container of significations that can serve as a *measure* of this potentiality. But in order for labor power to be measured and exchanged *as* money, there must be a repeated doubling of violence. What must remain on the outside of capital as a social relation is paradoxically what must also be simultaneously forced into its inside, perpetually torn between the forms of subjectivation that produce labor power as an inside, and the historical field of reproduction in which the worker's body is produced on the violent outside of capital. This internal exterior is the matrix of sociality in which violence's creative-formative aspect is brought out most prominently, and it is this rethinking that may help us to repoliticize and develop another "thought of the outside" capable of responding to the raw field of violence that is the supposedly smooth everyday life of capitalist society.

For Uno, the commodification of labor power is the "degree zero" of the social itself, the apex or pinnacle of the social relation called capital. But this "thing" indicated by the problem of the commodification of labor power, or more specifically the excess or absurdity (*muri*) of the commodification of labor power, is also an analytical or theoretical object, something that "discloses" the "degree zero" or "ultimate point" of the social itself. In other words, for Uno, the original "accident," the chance or hazardous historical encounter between capital and the owner of labor-power, is continuously being set in motion by capital in the circulation-form of the buying and selling of labor power, where we see the basic social "antagonism" (*Gegensatz*) between capital and labor. Yet when we enter the "hidden abode of production" (Essence), we discover not the stable yet concealed ground of this relation, rather we discover the site of its ultimate expression of "contradiction" (*Widerspruch*): we are immediately thrown back on the fact that although

labor power cannot be originally produced by capital as a commodity, it can be *circulated on the surface as a commodity*; that is, the excess or absurdity of the commodification of labor power can be overcome without being resolved. Thus this historically excessive or irrational accident of the original encounter that is being incessantly reinscribed on the circulation- surface of social life (Being), leads us from history to logic in the sphere of production (Essence). But critically, we are not presented here with something like the “truth” or pure relation of “depth” that lies “behind” or “below” the surface. Rather, we see that a certain process of coding is always taking place. What is coded as free contractual exchange between substantial entities of purely random origin is recoded in the sphere of production as the logical impossibility or even absurdity of the stability of this relation itself: “The sphere of Essence thus turns out to be a still imperfect combination of immediacy and mediation (*noch unvollkommenen Verknüpfung der Unmittelbarkeit und der Vermittlung*)...it is the sphere in which the contradiction, still implicit in the sphere of Being, is made explicit.”⁷³ This “implicit contradiction” of the sphere of Being or the circulation-surface is precisely what Marx called the “antagonism” between labour and capital, an “antagonism” that becomes a “contradiction” when it is “made explicit” in the “hidden abode of production” or the sphere of Essence. I would like to simply extrapolate certain political questions from the methodological project that Uno undertakes to arrive at this conclusion, a project, above all, of “force” or “forcing.” We will return to this point in the following chapter.

⁷³ Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse*, Erster Teil: *Die Wissenschaft der Logik* in *Werke in zwanzig Bänden: Theorie-Werkausgabe*, bd. 8, S. 235 (§ 114).

This excess/absurdity/irrationality of capital's relation to the labor power commodity therefore, is the site around which we can understand the relation of the critique of political economy to politics itself. Because of the contingency or undecidability of the commodification of labor power, capital must recode this contingency as necessity by rerouting its referent to the sphere of circulation (and specifically to the state, which acts as the occult midwife who assists at the "indirect" birth of labor power), it must reorder the internal sequencing of elements of the purely contingent or fortuitous encounter so that these elements connote or come to disclose a necessity, an exigency. By imagining that it can "get away with" filling the holes and ruptures in its austere motion with something derived from its absolute outside – the worker's body – capital accidentally but recurrently stumbles or "trips up" and draws our attention to the politicality of this excess/absurdity/irrationality for the first time. Uno's ultimate conclusion therefore is that in essence, dialectical materialism can only give proof-positive for its necessity as a social philosophy by considering the principles or pure theory of capital, that is, something absolutely removed from the sphere of practice.⁷⁴ But this paradox, which appears as something *disabling*, is in fact what enables us to at last utilize the archaeology of capital's internal logic as a lever or tool to force open the space of politics.

I would like to briefly consider the nature of this politicality by repeating an intriguing and unexpected point made by Alain Badiou about the nature of his most influential work, when he states that the entire work of *Being and Event* is in essence "a commentary on the International."⁷⁵ What does this strange juxtaposition mean, the

⁷⁴ See Uno, chapter one of *Shihonron to shakaishugi* in *UKc*, vol. 9.

⁷⁵ Badiou and Critchley, "Ours is not a terrible situation," 363.

superimposition of the question of the International, that is to say, the question of *political organization*, onto the concerns of this text, *Being and Event*? In what way can *Being and Event* be considered a “commentary on the International?” Following Uno’s identification of the limit point of the socius as this absurd or excessive moment of the commodification of labour power, we can say following Badiou’s clue as to our “reading protocols,” that politics proceeds exactly from the moment “when a situation will have appeared in which the indiscernible - which is only *represented* (or included) - is finally *presented* as a truth of the first situation.”⁷⁶ In other words, the proletarian hazard is “included” as a presumably stable or given element in capital’s austere self-movement insofar as it appears on the surface of the circulation process, but a proletarian *politics* only emerges when the original situation is “forced” to disclose that the proletariat was always-already or “will have been” the truth of capital, that the capitalist situation “will have been” revealed to be structured by the proletariat from the outset in precisely the temporality of “retrojection.”

Capital reveals a situation in which its structuring truth – labour power (and also land) – is tendentially absent, and must be forced back into it in order to “carry through” the politicality of this outsidedness. So only insofar as a truth that is “heterogeneous” to the situation is jammed or forced into it, can we politically respond to it. Capital’s outside, what is past the line traced around the theoretical object called capital, is something that can never be separated from the object. In other words, capital cannot *be* itself without this outside called labor power. Yet labor power is not an “absolute” outside: in truth, it does not exist as such, it is produced or emerges as a “semblance”

⁷⁶ Badiou, *L’être et l’événement*, 397-398.

(and Uno specifically uses this technical term from Hegel, *Schein* or *kashō*),⁷⁷ so that capital can bridge its irredeemable gap with the body of the worker or the flux of life. The “truth” of the situation called “capital” is precisely the semblance of labor power that is differentially “included” into capital’s body as a foreign element. In order for capital to be whole, to be complete, capital must paradoxically acknowledge its own incompleteness, or testify to its parasitism. Hence, in order to incorporate the “indirect” or subcontracted production of labor power, capital must disclose this weakness. But this fact alone does not furnish a politics, it does not itself indicate directions of the *politicality* of capitalist society. All it does is acknowledge the pseudo-completeness of capital, the “banal” or “mediocre” fact that capitalism is an oscillating space of differentiation within homogeneity that “coquets” as a pure circle. Politics is precisely what is excluded by the “always-already counted,” by the “numerical reduction” according to which “what is there” is the guarantee or legitimation of the situation’s own attempt to naturalize itself.

The position of the proletariat, its historical aim, is therefore not to insert into capitalist society a full and stable presence, to make the hazardous proletarian zero into a “plenitude,” into something “countable” (and here we should recall Marx’s interventions in the conceptions of “surplus,” “excess” and “plethora” of capital as the keys to his mature theory of crisis). Rather, the political aim that emerges at capital’s degree zero is precisely the elimination, overturning, or “inversion” (*Verkehrung*) of the relation between this “infinite class” called the proletariat and its situation, called capital. Why? Precisely because the working class, as the zero-point or ultimate limit of capital, is a volatile or unstable element of capital itself: “From a social point of view, therefore, the

⁷⁷ See Uno, “Rōdōryoku naru shōhin no tokushusei ni tsuite,” in *UKc*, vol. 3.

working class, even when not directly engaged in the labour process, is just as much an appendage (*Zubehör*) of capital as the ordinary instruments of labour. Even its individual consumption is, within certain limits, merely a moment in the reproduction process of capital. That process, however, takes good care to prevent these self-conscious instruments from leaving it in the lurch (*nicht weglassen*), for it removes their product, as fast as it is made, from their pole to the opposite pole of capital.”⁷⁸ Capital itself in effect “unplugs” the proletariat from one polarity of capital and reinserts it into another polarity. But because the proletariat, who is precisely a “self-conscious instrument of production” (*selbstbewußten Produktionsinstrumente*), must always be located by capital at one polarity or another, the proletarian hazard is always “sited,” “placed,” or “posited” (*setzen*) at capital’s limit or boundary. The “limit point” of this boundary is precisely the commodification of labour power, and therefore we can see directly that the self-elimination of the labor power commodity is the essential and ultimate aim of revolutionary politics. In other words, when Marx emphasizes the self-emancipation of the proletariat and the political consistency that will carry it through, he means that this consistency is in fact a self-erasure. That is, this emancipation is the elimination of itself, or what Foucault called the “dispersion” of the subject. In the same way that forcing operates by wagering on what is absent in the situation on the level of theory in order to produce a result on the level of history, so too does politics operate by its own logic of forcing. The political organization initiates a break with (or “hits”) the situation’s fullness in order to force its own void: the proletarian zero, which is the constitutive void of capitalist society, can only break the situation of its existence as the “living dead” by abolishing itself, by paradoxically continuing on in order to cease its own reproduction.

⁷⁸ Marx, *Capital*, v. 1 in *MECW*, v. 35: 573; *Das Kapital*, bd. 1 in *MEW*, bd. 23: 598-599.

Here we can refer to this position of the double bind by Badiou and François Balmès' phrase "communist invariants" (*invariants communistes*): "ideological invariants of a communist type, constantly regenerated by the unification process of the great popular revolts of all time."⁷⁹ These infinite invariants, "synthesize the universal aspiration of the exploited to reverse every principle (and we should pay attention to the word principle here) of exploitation and oppression. *They are born on the terrain of the contradiction between the masses and the State.*"⁸⁰ That is, they are born *outside* of the situation, but paradoxically structure the political directionalities of the situation's "void" elements, the elements that cannot be fully present in the situation, the proletarian outside or zero. But here who are the masses? Unlike many later interventions of the mid-twentieth century, when the concept "masses" was often rendered an ambiguously populist, romaniticized, and politically sterile concept, in my view we should always refer to Marx's decisive and careful definition of this term in the *Critique of the Gotha Program*: the masses are "the owners of the personal condition of production, of labor power" (*Eigentümer der persönlichen Produktionsbedingung, der Arbeitskraft*).⁸¹ As Uno carefully demonstrated, it is this "personal condition of production" called "labor power" that furnishes the ultimate limit of capital, and knowledge of the theoretical physics of this element remains the essential clue to the openings of politics.

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⁷⁹ Badiou and Balmès, *De l'idéologie* (Paris: Maspero, 1976), 67.

⁸⁰ Badiou and Balmès *De l'idéologie*, 67.

⁸¹ Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Program* in *MECW*, v. 24, 88. [*Kritik des Gothaer Programms* in *MEW*, bd. 19].

What we see above all in Uno's analysis of this bizarre and perverse *muri* or "nihil of reason" characterizing the form of labor power, is not simply a hyper-theoretical reschematization of Marx's thought. Rather, it is an intervention in history. In the subsequent chapter, we will take up this question by reconnecting the *muri* of the commodification of labor power to "the national question," emphasizing that what is at stake in the question of the nation-form is something central not only to the history of capitalism, but to the very inner logic of capital itself. In other words, we will see here how this *muri*, this space of slippage, torsion, and perversion, describes the demented or deranged nature of capital. But it also describes the paradox of capital's globality and nationality. In short, this *muri* of the commodification of labor power is nothing less than *the* concept of modernity as a whole. In the next chapters, we will first take up the theoretical dynamics by which this absence or void of reason operates in the volatile interval between logic and history; secondly, we will return to the historical object of "Japanese capitalism" in order to see how the "force of abstraction" of the capital-relation is not mitigated by the nation-form, but rather reaches its sublimely perverse zenith in the form of "the national question." Subsequently, we will expand this problem of "the national question" into two specific aesthetic fields: the poem-form and the film-form.

4. The Continent of History and the Theoretical Inside

An economic science inspired by *Capital* does not necessarily lead us (*ne conduit pas nécessairement*) to its utilization as a revolutionary power, and history seems to require help from something other than a predicative dialectic. The fact is that science, if one looks at it closely, has no memory. Once constituted, it forgets the circuitous path by which it came into being (*elle oublie les péripéties dont elle est née*).¹

- Jacques Lacan

Marxist philosophy, which combines within it theory and practice, can only deliver proof positive for dialectical materialism through the pivot of the principles of a pure capitalism or pure theory, which is as far removed as possible from practice.²

- Uno Kōzō

When Althusser claimed in 1960 that Marx's work could be summed up by one singular "discovery," he called this discovery "the continent of history," a "new scientific continent" opened up to "scientific knowledge."³ As is well-known, Althusser emphasizes from this point that Marxist *philosophy* had not adequately developed itself in tandem with its object, this "continent of History." But he never expressly develops the concept of this "continent" itself, nor does he justify precisely why this continent must be that of "History." Uno in turn systematized our knowledge of this continent, this "place" wherein the logical topology of capital as an interiority intersects with its site of localization, the exteriority of world history.

¹ Jacques Lacan, "La science et la vérité" in *Écrits*, t. 2. Paris: Seuil, 1966), 349-350.

² Uno, *Shihonron to shakaishugi* in *Uno Kōzō chosakushū*, vol. 10, 9.

³ On this phrase, see L. Althusser, "Philosophy as a Revolutionary Weapon," "Lenin and Philosophy," and "Preface to Capital, Volume One" in *Lenin and Philosophy and other essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1971), 45.

On the 100th anniversary of the publication of Marx's *Capital*, Uno and Sakisaka were scheduled to deliver lectures at the Kyudan Kaikan on June 4, 1967. Sakisaka, having heard Uno's lecture, declared "Uno's gone nuts" (*Uno-kun wa kawatta*).⁴ Why would he make such a declaration? Precisely because Uno's lecture (for which we do not have a record) argued that *the necessity of socialism could not be derived from Marx's Capital*, that the schematics of *Capital* furnished no proof of socialism as a *necessary* resolution of the problems capital posed to itself. In turn, this point was the central one around which critique of Uno's work frequently turned – in giving up the link between the *theoretical-historical* analysis undertaken in *Capital* and the *political* movement for socialism, was not Uno also giving up on the Marxist revolutionary project? This is the question we will now take up.

The analysis undertaken by Uno Kōzō on the question of the (im)possibility or "nihil of reason" (*muri*) characterizing the commodification of labor power, which we have just undertaken in the previous chapter, operates as a theoretical pivot which exposes two exteriorities, two suspensions. On the one hand, this moment discloses the theoretical physics of contamination between the logic of capital as a *putatively* closed circle and the history of capitalism as a developmental process. On the other hand, the fact that this (im)possibility is always "passing through" or "traversing" the gap of logic and history reveals another exteriority in the form of the *apparatuses* that allow or permit this "traversal," a suspension that ruptures the *apparently* smooth cycle of exchange. The leap or inversion-reversal of capital past its developmental boundaries, and the leap of the commodity into the form of money within exchange, are two moments that are

⁴ See Ishiko Yasukuni, *Rōnōha Marukusushugi: Riron, hito, rekishi*, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Shakai Hyōronsha, 2008), especially 233-236.

coextensive on a planar surface, implied or interlocking within each other. What seals together these moments is the volatile and hazardous undercurrent of capitalist dynamics that operates under the name of “the agrarian question.” In turn, this historical pivot leads us back into the unstable logical core of capital. Uno’s work constitutes a circuit, a circle whose point of departure is the debate on Japanese capitalism, but whose final theoretical point of return is also linked to the debate. Here we will see how Uno’s major historical point of analysis – the question of the *muri* of the commodification of labor power – is linked to his primary *methodological* mode of operation – the analysis of “pure capitalism” and the schema of “three levels of analysis.”

Uno Kōzō’s theoretical work utilizes the thought-experiment of a conceptually purified capitalism, in which capital’s *logical* tendency to finally reify itself is allowed to cyclically oscillate in theory, generating shards of insight into capital’s inner drive. In this sense, capital’s logical operation constitutes *a world* unto itself: Uno calls this “the world of principle” (*genriteki sekai*). Although this schematic of three levels of analysis – principle, or pure capitalism; stage-theoretical analysis of capitalist development; and conjunctural analysis of the immediate situation – seems at first to exclude the historical from the “world of principle,” in fact, Uno’s work presupposes that this logical “world” is not a pure circle, but a *torus*, a structure that constantly folds onto itself.

The torus is distinguished from a simple circle insofar as its exterior and its interior are coextensive, a planar field that folds or envelopes itself, continually opening and closing itself “inside out.” That is, the surface of the outside *suspends* or *interrupts* the pure interiority of the surface of the inside, but then extends itself or folds itself into its opposite. The analysis of “pure capitalism” shows us that while we can determine the

specifically logical drive of capital's interior motion, the *logical interior* itself is always paradoxically dependent on and coextensive with the *historical exterior* for its own conditions of interiority. This paradox is expressed as the (im)possibility, the “*nihil* of reason,” or *muri* of the commodification of labor power, the *Ur-Akt* or *arché* of capital's logic. In this sense, the scientific experiment called the “world of principle,” in which capital's drive is concretized and fully expressed, depends on the historical accident in the form of the so-called “primitive accumulation” or transition from feudalism to capitalism. In other words, when Uno argues, for example, that logically the circuit of commodities and money is interrupted by the *consumption process* and not by the production process, he is pointing out the paradox that the *historicity* of social relations is always-already suspending the pure and smooth circulation process.

These ontological gaps in capital's motion on a logical level therefore can only be worked out or schematized by means of the analysis of the *agrarian question*: thus Uno's analysis of the historical emergence of capitalism provides the linkage between his methodological experiment called “pure capitalism” and his theoretical innovation called “the (im)possibility of the commodification of labor power.” That is, these two moments are welded together by the question of *traversal, passage, passing, the conduit, the transition*. The transition between feudalism and capitalism expresses not only a historical moment, but also a logical one: although capitalist social relations *should* be strictly impossible, they have *passed into* a smooth cycle in which the ontological gap or (im)possibility does not function solely as an *obstacle*, but is instead incessantly-repetitively traversed *without ever being resolved*. We must therefore expose the

mechanisms by which this contamination between the smooth cycle of theory and the “savage exterior” of history is continuously erased.

In other words, we will remind ourselves here of the *critique* of political economy: we will investigate the genesis of how it is that science “forgets the circuitous path by which it came into being.” Political economy forms itself as a circle, as a cycle devoted to its own systematicity. But this systematicity, once established, obliterates its own memory of its conditions of production. The key to this problem is *the agrarian question*. In turn, it is by opening up this “circuitous path” that economics seeks to conceal, that we can also restore Uno’s theoretical work to the status of a *critique of economics* itself, rather than simply an alternative and competing “system.” His schematization of the levels of analysis of political-economic inquiry should not be read as a means to “rescue” or “save” the supposed “rationality” of the “respectable” and “decent” system of *Nationalökonomie*,⁵ but rather the opposite: the analytic of “pure capitalism” in fact exposes us to the inherent irrationality of social science itself. Uno’s work in this sense constitutes a crucial step in the *critique of political economy*.

The Agrarian Question: Historical Boundaries of Capital’s Logic

On a worldwide level, analysis of Uno’s work has almost always agreed on its supposedly “formalist” character – that is, he is widely considered an esoteric, purely theoretical, excessively formalistic and scholastic figure in the Marxian analysis of value, but we ought to dislocate, dis-place, and disrupt this reading. Uno rather makes a kind of

⁵ See here “Zur logischen Misere der Nationalökonomie” in Hans-Georg Backhaus, *Dialektik der Wertform: Untersuchungen zur Marxschen Ökonomiekritik* (Freiburg: Ça ira Verlag, 1997).

wager on the possibility of a certain excessive formalism as the only means available to us to “express” the abstraction of the circuit-process of capital, but he is always undercutting the purity of this circuit by drawing our attention to this one phrase that concentrates within it the density of politics. This is what Uno referred to by the term “(im)possibility” or “*nihil* of reason” of the commodification of labor power (*rōdōryoku shohinka no ‘muri’*). Through this concept, produced by way of the debate on Japanese capitalism, it might be polemically argued that Uno’s greatest contribution to Marxist theoretical research was to restore the specifically *theoretical* content of ‘the national question’ to its essential role as the pivot or lever of the volatile articulation between the logic of capital and the history of capitalism. In this sense, his analysis of the ‘late-developing countries’ is not merely devoted to the clarification of the origin and maintenance of Japanese capitalism; rather, it furnishes us with a general set of clues towards a rethinking of the position of the form of the nation-state itself within the analysis of capital’s dynamics. In other words, Uno himself is an artist of forcing, of *forçage*: a “partisan and artisan” in Althusser’s terms. What is at stake in Uno’s development of the schematic of “three levels of analysis” cannot simply be sorted out by arguing that he proposes a neat and clean separation of logic, history, and politics. Rather, this schema is itself a theoretical apparatus that allows us to expose precisely the opposite: the contamination and political ruptures that characterize the putatively “smooth” circuit of capital, intended to be indifferent to the machinations of the immediate historical world.

But we cannot approach this question “head on” or “frontally,” instead taking a “circuitous” path towards its explication: the problem of the concept of a “pure

capitalism” does not begin on the level of method in a “pure” sense, but in the historical investigation of *the agrarian question*. “In tandem with my work on Marx’s *Capital*,” Uno states, “the research I undertook on the agrarian question constitutes precisely the foundation or ground of the methodological system of three levels of analysis that I continued to develop in the postwar period.”⁶ This research that Uno undertook was a direct result of the history of the debate on Japanese capitalism, that is, a direct result of his *transversal* or *diagonal* intervention into this debate.⁷ He reconsiders the common wisdom of the transition to capitalism by focusing on the process of disintegration of the form of the rural village in Japan. In doing so, he emphasizes a complex parallax between what he calls “feudality” and “modernity.” That is, he does not argue that the transition to capitalism occurs in the form of a decisive rupture or comprehensive break. Rather, he emphasizes that this “feudality” constituted not an impediment that had to be overcome, but rather precisely the enabling condition for capitalism’s emergence and development. In re-reading Marx’s analysis of the transition, Uno points out that what appears to be the raw violence of the outside, mobilized to dissolve the old relations and pave the way for a new order, is in fact already a violence of the *inside*:

The rural village structure, which had formed the social basis of the *ancien régime* was thus seemingly dismantled through violence, yet at the same time, *this was also in fact an expression of the planned balancing and harmonization of capitalist production*. The pastures, expanded to accommodate the goal of wool exports, offered raw materials to the domestic wool industry, and the peasantry, expelled from the land in precisely the same process, became the laboring proletariat, the force which spurred on the capitalist industrialization of the wool and other medieval industries, which were at that point still being managed and

⁶ Uno Kōzō, “Nōgyō mondai joron” in *Uno Kōzō chosakushū* [hereafter *UKC*], vol. 8 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1974), 4.

⁷ On this point see in particular Ouchi Hideaki, “Uno keizaigaku no keisei: Nihon shihonshugi ronsō no shiyō” in *Uno keizaigaku no kihon mondai* (Tokyo: Gendai hyōronsha, 1971), 8-54.

administered on the level of simple handicrafts. *Thus the emerging proletariat was itself used as a powerful force of pressure in order to forcibly subordinate the existing artisans to capital.*⁸

Thus, this process of the creation of relations that would furnish the logical interior of capital's historical appearance in the form of the social system called *capitalism* is always-already in a temporal sequence that is "out of joint," that has at its core a basic paradox. If the transition from feudalism to capitalism is the production of the wage-earning proletariat, stripped of everything but its labor power, from the "raw material" of the peasantry, the question remains how such a process could be effected without a schematic of relations that is itself already established. In other words, the *schema* of capital must necessarily pre-exist its historical appearance, yet simultaneously, capital's very narrative of its appearance relies on the "story" of its "birth," therefore also relying on the exterior of this story, something that could begin or initiate the story that is not included in the story as such. It is in this sense that the outside must always be the erased or recoded *lever* or pivot according to which the schematic division of inside and outside could be established, maintained, and cyclically returned back to the origin, so that the raw outside or accident could appear as the *necessary historical precondition* for the "logical" developmental narrative to emerge. Thus "capitalist development constitutes the expanded reproduction of these relations, but the emergence of this developmental cycle itself had to newly create these relations whether by force or not."⁹

In turn, this "new creation" of relations, which expresses the fundamental contamination between the logic and the history of capital, must be *dis-placed* (we will

⁸ Uno, "Shihonshugi no seiritsu to nōson bunkai no katei" in *UKC*, vol. 8 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1974), 24-25, my italics.

⁹ Uno, "Shihonshugi no seiritsu to nōson bunkai no katei" in *UKC*, vol. 8 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1974), 25.

return to this decisive term later in this essay), recoded, and reordered by means of new *mechanisms* or apparatuses that could *conduct* this process through its encounters with its own logical irrationality, in such a way as to appear wholly rational. Therefore, “policies of commerce, finance, colonization and so forth were able to accelerate the process of separation between the means of production and productive labor through commodity-economic methods. Of course, these policies were at the outset carried out through exceptionally blatant and directly violent means (*kiwamete rokotsu naru shibashiba chokusetsuteki ni bōryokuteki naru shudan*), but gradually took on indirect and disguised forms (*kansetsuteki naru inpei saretaru keitai*), and increasingly become densely imbued with certain national characteristics (*kokuminteki seishitsu*), before eventually becoming unnecessary as such.”¹⁰ Yet this relation of inside and outside, the paradoxical reliance or “leaning on” the stratum of history while arrogating itself as a logic, is never fully made “unnecessary.” Rather, what allows this reliance to appear unnecessary, not conjoined by any requirements, is the ceaseless formation of apparatuses through which the relations, which are always subject to the logical slippage or dislocation (in Althusser’s sense of *décalage*)¹¹ of their origin, could be posited and re-posited as necessary and progressive steps in the pure inside. But “even in the liberal era, which attempted to eliminate to the greatest extent possible any form of extra-economic coercion, the limitations to labor time must have been set by means of the law, and thus could not completely be entrusted, in the laissez-faire sense, to purely economic relations.”¹²

¹⁰ Uno, “Shihonshugi no seiritsu to nōson bunkai no katei” in *UKC*, vol. 8 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1974), 26.

¹¹ Althusser, “Lenin and Philosophy” in *Lenin and Philosophy and other essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1971), 45.

¹² Uno, “Iwayuru keizaigai kyōsei ni tsuite” in *UKC*, vol. 8 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1974), 66-67.

In turn this problem leads us directly back to the agrarian question. This is precisely because, “when capitalist methods of production are employed in agriculture, land ownership must also come under the general domination of the law of value (*kachi hōsoku*) However, although land is a crucial means of production, it is not capital. [...] Land itself can be differentiated thus, precisely because from capital’s viewpoint *it is something given from the outside*, so to speak. In order for it to be subordinated to capital’s demand for the law of value, land must be separated from property and management from the outset, and a form of property corresponding to capitalist methods of production must be established. In other words, while capitalist methods of production attempt to economically realize these demands even in relation to landed property, it is never something rational (*gōriteki na mono*) for these capitalist methods of production themselves: rather, it is a concession or compromise (*jōho*) made between capital and an exclusive or monopolized form of possession. Capital makes this compromise through a specific or peculiar *mechanism* (*tokushu na kikō*) on the level of the law of value.”¹³ We will return shortly to this concept of “mechanism” or “apparatus” (*kikō*), but for the time being, let us simply note its crucial place in this problem. Because the analysis of capital as a logic always leads us back to its origins as a social relation capable of ordering an entire form of society, we are always returning to the problem posed by what lies outside of it. What we are then confronted by is not only capital’s drive to enclose all existing relations so as to be commensurable with its project, but rather and more importantly, capital’s drive to overwrite, to recode, to *semiotically reorder* these relations and forms so that they can be historically rerouted back to the cyclical origin and once more

¹³ Uno, “Iwayuru keizaigai kyōsei ni tsuite” in *UKC*, vol. 8 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1974), 67-68, my italics.

logically derived as if they constituted merely the prehistory of the necessary unfolding of capitalist development. In this way, capital not only encloses the outside while relying on it, more specifically it *forces* the outside to invert or reverse itself into the inside, it “folds” the historical exterior “inside out” so that it can function as the putatively logical interior.

On a historical level, Uno’s analysis, as we saw earlier, does not “deny the existence of extra-economic coercion in the sense of the existence of forms of power which operate outside the sphere of economy.” Rather, it attempts to *theoretically* “clarify the foundations of such a function of power,” all the while refusing to make the assumption “that this thing that functions outside the economy can be considered feudal, or that it can be conflated with the feudal social system” as a simple expression of “semi-feudalism” and so forth.¹⁴ Uno’s theoretical explication of the question of extra-economic coercion within the analysis of the agrarian question is an intervention against the image of two sides, two “shores” of history: the “accomplished fact” of modernity on one and the “backwards” “stagnant” form of feudalism on the other. This image expresses the mistaken notion that capitalist rationality, the logical unfolding of relations as posited by capital itself, is a pure circle over against which is posed the raw and savage outside of history, that it is an “inside” which *axiomatically* excludes the “outside.” But this image cannot be rigorously sustained in an analysis of capital, because everything that capital will “retroject” back onto its own functioning in order to appear cyclical and harmonious, must always experience a “first return to origins” in order to be reproduced.

Uno’s analysis of the agrarian question in Japanese capitalist development continually reminds us that the paradox of inside and outside that obtains in the volatile

¹⁴ Uno, “Waga kuni nōson no hōkensei” in *UKC*, vol. 8 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1974), 64-65.

amalgam of logic and history in the form of capital in general, is always forming and creating *apparatuses* that will allow it to continue its motion through the erasure of these gaps. Thus, “rather than its industrial form, so-called finance capital became the most important mechanism for the establishment of capitalism in the late-developing countries and this new form of capital created a new political centrality in the form of the nation-state, through the concentration of the capitalist forces of each individual nation. Nationalism centered on the state (*kokkashugi*) had to be reinforced with a new content. Although there was an extremely important political significance to the dissolution of the rural village itself within a wider process of social division and dissolution, this process of dissolution could not be allowed to take place everywhere, it had to be somehow held back or impeded. The nearly impossible economic problem for the nation-state of unifying agriculture and industry under capitalism in the state-form nevertheless became an absolutely essential political task.”¹⁵ Capital must operate so as to both push forward or *set in motion* and simultaneously to *arrest* or *seize up* the spasmodic form of its deterritorialization of the earth. It must, in this sense, *stop* the very process that it itself must undertake. This is precisely why Uno locates something essential for capital’s dynamics in the *production of the nation-state*. That is, the nation-state must be produced, managed, and maintained, in order for the process of the dissolution of the village to be *arrested* before it spins out of control. The nation-state, in this sense, is what *holds back* capital’s axiomatic deterritorialization of itself. It is a “coding” or “valuing” that allows for the management of a set of dynamics that inherently cannot be managed, that is inherently undermining itself. Yet the form of the nation-state also serves as the apparatus

¹⁵ Uno, “Shihonshugi no seiritsu to nōson bunkai no katei” in *UKC*, vol. 8 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1974), 39.

by which the dissolution of the village can be undertaken in the first place: in the form of separation, division, and enclosure, it installs the circular legitimation mechanism of landed property, whose image is derived from the state as the ultimate image of the landlord.

The debate on Japanese capitalism, and therefore on the nature and location of the agrarian question in theory, leads Uno to a seemingly paradoxical conclusion: that the so-called “feudal remnants” were not in fact “remnants” of feudalism in the strong sense, that is, *obstacles* or *blocks* on capital’s local deployment, but rather precisely the opposite: “The problem cannot be understood from the perspective that these forms were fundamentally something feudal, something that remained or survived within Japanese capitalism, but rather must be posed in terms of *how* Japanese capitalist development *managed* or *administered* the functioning of these feudal relations.”¹⁶ In other words, we see here something exceptionally important in Uno’s *historical* understanding that will exert a certain theoretical pressure on the *logical* form of capital’s functioning: the role of the *mechanisms* or *apparatuses* that would allow for the development of this paradoxical relation in which what *should be* an obstacle instead functions to buttress, to nurture, to support or aid. This is exactly how Uno will repeatedly disclose to us capital’s essential dementia, a dementia that *should* arrest or obstruct its function, and yet through the formation and maintenance of these *apparatuses*, capital will be able to overcome its own demented logic *without resolving the “nihil of reason” that characterizes its inner drive*. Already then, we see the historical contamination according to which the theoretical structure is formed.

¹⁶ Uno and Tohata Seiichi, *Nihon nōgyō no zenbō*, vol. 4: *Nihon shihonshugi to nōgyō* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1960), 32n.1.

Two Limits: Purity and Exteriority

But the revolution is thoroughgoing. It is still traveling through purgatory. It does its work methodically. By December 2, 1851, it had completed half of its preparatory work; now it is completing the other half. *It first completed the parliamentary power (die parlamentarische Gewalt) in order to be able to overthrow it.* Now that it has achieved this, it completes the executive power, *reduces it to its purest expression, isolates it, sets it up against itself as the sole target, in order to concentrate all its forces of destruction against it (reduziert sie auf ihren reinsten Ausdruck, isoliert sie, stellt sie sich als einzigen Vorwurf gegenüber, um alle ihre Kräfte der Zerstörung gegen sie zu konzentrieren).* And when it has accomplished this second half of its preliminary work, Europe will leap from its seat and exult: Well burrowed, old mole!¹⁷

What is interesting and powerful in Marx's work is neither his particular form of critique, nor his politics, nor his economic analyses as such. The theoretical center of Marx instead is something called "the critique of political economy." In other words, it is a critique, a critical analysis. It is also something political: that is, its theoretical object is political, but its aims are also political. It concerns this discursive object called "the economy," or rather, the concrete expression of the relations buttressing a capitalist commodity-economic society in the historical process of the world. But it is not simply one of these things: it is an analytical and theoretical strategy that passes through and encompasses all these moments, a diagonal line of analysis that is transversal to the discourses it moves through. In my view, we can also take a theoretical clue from the work of Alain Badiou, and call it a strategy of force, or forcing. What does this mean?

¹⁷ Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* in *MECW*, vol. 11 (Moscow: Progress, 1979), 185; Marx, *Der achtzehnte Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte* in *MEW*, Bd. 8 (Berlin, Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED: Dietz Verlag, 1962), 196.

It is not something entirely different from Engels' famous analysis of "The Role of Force in History," that is, it is not something entirely separate from the question of violence. It is a violent strategy, but not in the common-sensical use of this term "violence." Rather, force (*force*, *Kraft* but also *Zwang*, coercion, "forcing open") here means the rapid and dramatic dislocation of the analytical object from its usual phenomenal conditions in order to generate a theoretical effect. In other words, it is a theoretical strategy operating within theory itself. Forcing means: the exposure of the theoretical object to its theoretical outside, not a substantial outside, but an outside that is internal to the thing it is estranged from, the thing that includes it in its "count" of itself, but which can only be foreign from its conditions or situation of emergence. The "outside" that is implied, therefore, in the question of force or forcing, is not an "absolute" outside, because such a thing can never exist. Why can such an "absolute outside" not exist? When we encounter a theoretical object, and approach it in the battlefield of theory, we nevertheless grasp its outside (that which cannot strictly speaking be entirely contained within the object) as *within* the economy (*oikonomia*) of the object itself. If it is the "outside to *something*," then it is not conceivable without the circulation-space of this something, the object itself. In other words, when we speak of an outside there is no way to avoid speaking of an inside. Yet, we cannot speak of something for which there is no outside at all. A theoretical object, which is the bracketed product of the total physical and spiritual deployment of an act of abstraction from the social field, always exists within an *economy*. The economy is what envelops and wraps itself around the object, giving it its object-ness. That is, the givenness of the theoretical object is only given insofar as it lies within a field, zone, or plane in which its object-ness can circulate

and legitimate itself as an object. But this legitimation, or the object's capacity to draw its own borders, to enclose itself as an object, demonstrates that whenever a line is drawn, two zones are created. These two zones were previously contiguous. Yet when the border of the object is drawn, an "in" and an "out" appear. But the object's object-ness prevents us from approaching the "out" directly. We only have access to the enclosed object, whose limits are drawn in order to render it theorizable within the theoretical field. Therefore, the "outside" is neither strictly speaking "external" nor is it "unrelated" to the object. Rather, we can say that a theoretical object's "inside" connotes what is *full* in the economy, while its "outside" connotes what is *absent* or *void* within the *oikonomia*.

Marx's critique of political economy is always involved at the level of method with tracing a line around a phenomenal object, not in order to clarify its fullness or plentitude, but in order to *force* this object to disclose what is absent in its presentation of itself. Spivak perfectly explicates this point, by arguing that "Marx's project is to create *the force* that will make appear the massive confrontation between capital and its complicit other (its *Gegen-satz*, its counterposition, literally contradiction) – socialized labor."¹⁸ In order to explicate this methodological point let us play close attention to a famous passage of *Capital*, volume 1, in which Marx argues as follows:

The consumption of labour-power is at one and the same time the production of commodities and of surplus-value. The consumption of labour-power is completed, as in the case of every other commodity, outside the limits of the market or of the sphere of circulation. Accompanied by Mr. Moneybags and by the possessor of labour-power, we therefore take leave for a time of this noisy sphere, where everything takes place on the surface and in view of all men, and follow them both into the hidden abode of production, on whose threshold there stares us in the face "No admittance except on business." Here we shall see, not only how capital produces, but how capital is produced. We shall at last *force* the

¹⁸ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Limits and Openings of Marx in Derrida" in *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (London: Routledge, 1993), 108, my emphasis.

secret of profit-making.¹⁹

In the German original, this last sentence states, “Das Geheimnis der Plusmacherei muß sich endlich enthüllen,”²⁰ “The secret of profit-making (literally: “surplus-making”) must at last be revealed.” This “muß” therefore contains an essential methodological point that we should pay close attention to. In the so-called “Lachâtre” version of the first volume of *Capital*, the only translation thoroughly corrected by Marx himself, this last sentence closely parallels the German original: “La fabrication de la plus value, ce grand secret de la société moderne, va enfin se dévoiler.”²¹ Interestingly however, in Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling’s English version of *Capital* (overseen by Engels), this passage is somewhat “overtranslated,” but precisely in this “overtranslation,” something decisive emerges in the translation of this final phrase: “*We shall at last force the secret of profit-making*.”²² More than simply the inherent transpositions and transformations that accompany all acts of translation, we ought to read this term “force” as itself a conceptual

¹⁹ Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 in *MECW*, vol. 35 (New York: International Publishers, 1996), 185-186.

²⁰ Marx, *Das Kapital*, Bd. 1 in *MEW*, Bd. 23 (Berlin, Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED: Dietz Verlag), 189. Here, we should note the strange sexual economy of Marx’s use of the verb “enthüllen” (to reveal, to uncover), literally to “un-sheath” (*Hülle*, “sheath”). Freud extensively utilizes this term in the sense of “uncovering” the repressed sexual psychic life of the hysteric, a term which resonates with the sense of revealing the sordid sexual practices hidden behind a façade. In this sense we should recall that this passage occurs precisely to alert us to the generative-renewing role of the “use” of labor power in capital’s dynamics, itself a “scandalous,” paradoxical, and yet constitutive moment that Marx’s work is intended to “disclose.” I owe thanks to Yutaka Nagahara for discussions on this point. We should also note that this term is central to Marx’s own description of his project of *critique*: “to lay bare the economic law of motion of modern society” (“das ökonomische Bewegungsgesetz der modernen Gesellschaft zu enthüllen”). See Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 in *MECW*, vol. 35 (New York: International Publishers, 1996), 10; Marx, *Das Kapital*, Bd. 1 in *MEW*, Bd. 23 (Berlin, Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED: Dietz Verlag), 15.

²¹ Marx, *Le Capital*, traduction de M.J. Roy, entièrement révisée par l’auteur (Paris: Maurice Lachâtre et cie, 1872), 75.

²² Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 in *MECW*, vol. 35 (New York: International Publishers, 1996), 186.

innovation, because it discloses a very specific dynamics crucial to Marx's work, and more broadly, crucial to Uno's development of it.

In this sense of "force," which seals together the self-disclosure of capital with the active "forcing" of theory, we see Marx's method revealed clearly: to not merely investigate the social role of capital, but to theoretically *force* capital to reveal its own secrets, to engage in a theoretical experiment through which capitalism itself discloses its own essence. Hence, here Marx takes us from capital's apparently smooth surface, where "freedom" – freely agreed contracts, equality in exchange, each selling and buying his or her own property for his or her own gain – seems to be everywhere, into capital's depths, where force or coercion (*Zwang*) forms the violent undercurrent of capture that grounds these supposed "freedoms." In other words, the use of the word "force" here shows us a doubled point. On the one hand, Marx's method itself "forces open" the seemingly closed self-concealing/self-disclosing systematic circuit of capitalist accumulation, which "hides in plain view." On the other hand, when we follow this method, and "force open" the "secrets of profit-making," we discover an undercurrent of force as well.

Let us return to Uno's work, and particularly his theoretical microscope or diagnostic apparatus called the "three levels of theoretical analysis." This tool, which furnishes the logical form of analysis or experimental scenario that we are attempting to utilize, is a schematic, but more specifically a *schema* in the Kantian sense – a procedural rule or intervening determination which is not simply an "image." In other words, this schema is not simply "applied" to an object. This theory of three levels of analysis is not simply "applied" to an object called "capitalism" that is encountered in sensation in order to record what happens as a result. Rather, it is a weapon or device that is forcefully

inserted or shoved into the situation that bears the name “capital.” By ramming this weapon into capital’s smooth self-definition, Uno attempts to see how capital behaves when it is forced to disclose its essence, by being purified or determined in accordance with a schema that disables capital’s own techniques of insinuation. By differentiating between three levels or geological strata of political economy — principle or pure theory (*genriron*), the stadial historical development of capital (*dankairon*), and the conjunctural analysis of the immediate situation (*genjō bunseki*) — Uno is aiming at something fundamental for our discussion of “force.” How does capital think about its own operation? How can politics be conceived in relation to capital’s own self-movement? If capital’s self-movement is a contained and endlessly spinning circuit, how can we account for its outside, the externalities on which it paradoxically relies for its own pseudo-wholeness? In order to deal with these basic questions, Uno utilizes this tripartite weapon in order to illuminate the gaps or ruptures between the levels at which theory operates. However, he is not concerned with merely producing a result *in theory*. Rather, he practices the art of dislocation – he utilizes the gaps of theory’s own self-definition to force a result *in history*. In other words, Uno’s methodological innovations and re-codings of Marx’s work do not only function as a re-systematization of so-called “political economy” – despite his own insistence on the separation of politics from the work of theory, Uno’s theoretical arsenal discloses the *politicality of theory*, and in doing so, simultaneously opens up the historical possibilities of politics.

Uno intervenes in theory to show that capitalism can be systematized as a pure circuit: he calls this internal dream or fantasy of capital “the world of principle, or pure capitalism” (*genriteki sekai = junsui shihonshugi*), in other words, it is an experimental

world that has been purged of its world-ness, a pure spinning circuit that exists only as a schematic systematization.²³ Strictly speaking, this “world of principle” does not exist as such. In fact, “the reality of capitalism is that it never perfectly completes this systematization (*taikeika*). But capitalist development itself, until a more or less fixed instant, is always located within the directionality of systematic perfection (*kanseika*).”²⁴ What is the purpose of such a thought-experiment? First and foremost, it is an intervention. The intervention operates by introducing into a given scenario something that is strictly speaking absent. An intervention proceeds by forcing a situation to confront or admit its own void, those elements whose exclusion or absence structures the interior of the situation, but which do not exist within it as such. In other words, an intervention brings the outside, or what cannot be entirely included on the level of an element, into the interior in order to force a result. By positing this world of principle, Uno allows us to schematize not only the gaps in history that appear by comparison, but also the gaps of the supposedly perfect circle of capital’s self-movement.

As a technique, this positing operates as what Alain Badiou has called the “anticipating hypothesis for the generic being of a truth, a forcing. Forcing is the powerful fiction of a completed truth. Starting with such a fiction, new pieces of

²³ Let me note that I do not take up here the many critical reappraisals of Uno’s understanding of this “pure capitalism.” Among a vast number of sources, see for example Iwata Hiroshi, *Marukusu keizaigaku*, 2 vols. (Tokyo: Morita Shoten, 1967-1969); Mita Sekisuke, *Uno riron to Marukusushugi keizaigaku* (Tokyo: Aoki Shoten, 1968); Satō Kinzaburō, *Shihonron to Uno keizaigaku* (Tokyo: Shinhyōron, 1968); Kaneko Haruo, *Kōza Marukusushugi kenkyū nyūmon*, vol. 3 (Tokyo: Aoki Shoten, 1974); and an overview in Furihata Setsuo, ed. 1979, *Uno riron no gendankai*, vol. 1: *Keizaigaku genriron. Ronsōshiteki kaimei* (Tokyo: Shakai Hyōronsha, 1979). The question of “pure capitalism” is here utilized simply as a lexical clue to the elucidation of the *politicality* of theory itself. I would like to take another opportunity elsewhere to revisit the world-history of the reception of Uno’s concept of “pure capitalism” from the viewpoint of the theory of crisis.

²⁴ Uno, “Keizaigaku ni okeru ronshō to jissshō” in *UKC*, vol. 4 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1974), 11.

knowledge can be forced, without even verifying this knowledge.”²⁵ Michel Foucault earlier emphasized exactly this same form of intervention in the analysis of the politics of truth, “to make a fiction work inside of truth, to induce truthful effects with this fiction, and to operate in such a manner that the discourse of truth gives rise to, ‘manufactures,’ something that does not yet exist, that is, ‘fictions’ it.”²⁶

Occasionally, critics of Uno’s work point out that this “pure capitalism” does not exist, that capitalism is never “pure” but always contaminated by the historical and institutional levels of development in the social formation and so on. But this criticism misses completely the theoretical technique that Uno utilizes, what Badiou has referred to above as a “forcing.” The point here is precisely that Uno does not need to “prove” the existence of something called “pure capitalism,” nor does he need to “verify” it as a piece of knowledge. Rather, by wagering on this “completed fiction,” that is, by utilizing it as a lever through which to “force” new knowledges, Uno can force capital to disclose not only its weaknesses, but also its own self-image, its dream of a perfect world wherein it meets no obstacles or boundaries. In other words, he uses this technique to demonstrate that capital can never be without its originary historical contamination. Uno wagers on this “completed fiction” in order to force the disclosure of new operations of knowledge, new segments and sequences of thought. This logic of force or presupposition is precisely why Uno pays such close attention to Marx’s use of the verb *setzen* (positing, placing, supposing, deploying, putting, etc). What does it mean that capital “pre-posit” or “pre-supposes” (*voraussetzen*) the elements of its own operation, whose existence it then uses in order to legitimate itself? This is precisely the foundation of capital’s “occult quality”

²⁵ Badiou, “The Ethic of Truths: Construction and Potency” in *Pli* 12 (London, 2001), 252.

²⁶ Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 193.

(*die okkulte Qualität*) through which it self-expands as value, adding value to itself (*Selbstverwertung*).²⁷

Althusser, for instance, frequently identified this paradoxical logic of capital, in which the “elements precede the forms,” and these forms then extend themselves on the basis of the elements, as if the elements were productions of the forms. But because theory also operates in terms of the characteristics of its theoretical object, this problem of “setzen” is also one that operates at the level of method, the “positing” of this absent thing called “pure capitalism,” this void that allows us to “force” knowledge of the conjuncture. As Uno points out, “we ought to compare this purely capitalist society to an experimental device or apparatus (*jikken sōchi*), in the sense employed by the natural sciences. It is not something we can simply exclude as a ‘disruptive element’ by means of a specific determinate viewpoint. It is rather the ‘spiritual concrete’ or ‘concrete in the mind’ (*geistig Konkretes*)²⁸ capable of corresponding to the developmental tendency of capitalist society.”²⁹ What is this experimental apparatus or laboratory tool? It is obvious that “in the analysis of economic forms, neither microscopes nor chemical reagents are of use. The force of abstraction must replace both (*Die Abstraktionskraft muß beide*

²⁷ Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 in *MECW*, vol. 35 (New York: International Publishers, 1996), 165; Marx, *Das Kapital*, Bd. 1 in *MEW*, Bd. 23 (Berlin, Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED: Dietz Verlag), 169.

²⁸ Although it is not specifically cited in the original Japanese text, by the phrase *seishinteki ni gutaiteki na mono*, Uno is clearly referring to this highly particular term utilized by Marx (via Hegel) in the *Grundrisse* manuscripts. See Marx, *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* in *MEW*, Bd. 42 (Berlin, Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED: Dietz Verlag, 1983), 35; Marx, *Economic Manuscripts of 1857-1858* [Grundrisse] in *MECW*, vol. 28, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1986), 38.

²⁹ Uno, “Keizaigaku ni okeru ronshō to jishshō” in *UKC*, vol. 4 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1974), 18.

ersetzen).”³⁰ In order to understand the theoretical physics of this *Abstraktionskraft* as a diagnostic device, we should also overcode or overtranslate this term that Uno uses to describe the experimental apparatus of “pure capitalism,” what Marx called a “geistiges Konkretes.” In other words, it is not only a “spiritual” (*geistiges*) concrete, it is also a “ghostly” (*geistiges*) concrete, a haunting figure that inhabits a world it cannot truly be within. The ghost is precisely the figure of the absence that haunts all presence, the figure that in-habits a situation while constantly forcing that situation to confront its absence, or that which cannot find a place or body within the interior, but can only trace the exterior from the inside. “Pure capitalism” as a “ghostly concrete” structures capitalism itself, the historical lived capitalism that we experience in life practice. Pure capitalism has no body, it is un-in-habited/un-in-habitable, it has no incarnation, but it is paradoxically the most concrete thing that structures capital’s historical expansion: it is capital’s drive (*Trieb*). The drive is strictly absent from immediacy – it is not the same thing as biological instinct (*Instinkt*).³¹ But the absent drive is also what demonstrates capital’s finitude, its pseudo-immortality. As a “ghostly concrete,” capital is precisely the massive agglomeration of the living dead, a specter or wraith that concatenates into one ghostly

³⁰ Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 in *MECW*, vol. 35 (New York: International Publishers, 1996), 8; Marx, *Das Kapital*, Bd. 1 in *MEW*, Bd. 23 (Berlin, Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED: Dietz Verlag), 12.

³¹ This use of the term “drive” should be clarified. “Drive” or *Trieb* can be understood here in Freud’s sense, as a force of pulsion that pushes something towards an object of satisfaction; it should not be confused with simple instinct (*Instinkt*). When we apply this term to capital, it expresses the crucial point that capital is a social relation in which the commodity economy is the only social principle. Therefore, the reproduction of capitalist society itself, the total reproduction of the society as a whole, must always pass through or be mediated by the form of the commodity. Capitalism therefore is always “driving” towards a pure commodity economy, one in which all social relations are purely commodified, although it never completely accomplishes this goal – in fact, it cannot accomplish this goal, because it requires something outside of its own circuit: labor power. Nevertheless, even if capitalism is never perfectly systematized according to its own ideal schematics, even if it can never reach its object of satisfaction (pure capitalism), capital possesses at all times a drive or directionality *towards* this systematicity.

absence/presence the totality of living labor. In other words, “although a purely capitalist society can never be concretely realized, the fact that at a certain stage of development it begins to develop in this pure direction by means of its own forces (*jiryoku*), and the fact that its underside or reverse (*ura*) expresses a historical process in which this development is reversed, forcing capitalism to anticipate its own termination (*shūmatsu*), simultaneously forces the theoretical systematization of this process towards its own completion or perfection.”³² This absence that conditions the worldly presentation of capital, this specter called the “world of principle, or pure capitalism,” is constantly appearing as a silhouette, as a vanishing point or something like the perspectival point in a three-dimensional diagram. It is strictly absent from the scene, but organizes the situation in its own image. By utilizing this perspectival point Uno forces the commodity economy to disclose where its weakness lies: “From the outset, labor power, which cannot be a product of the commodity economy itself, is passing through an “impossibility” or “excess” which commodifies it (*shōhinka suru muri o tōshite iru*) just like all other general products. The basis which enables this “passing through” is given to a certain extent (*tōshi uru kiso o ichiō wa ataerareru*). In other words, as something that is in essence historically limited, the commodity economy never concretely commodifies the entirety of the social, but rather can be theoretically systematized as something which develops towards this direction.”³³ Uno theoretically systematizes a purely capitalist society as a “completed fiction.” That is, it is a fiction and therefore necessarily incomplete, but it is a self-contained fiction that *completes itself* in theory. It bears a close

³² Uno, “Keizaigaku ni okeru ronshō to jisshō” in *UKC*, vol. 4 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1974), 19.

³³ Uno, “Keizaigaku ni okeru ronshō to jisshō” in *UKC*, vol. 4 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1974), 12.

resemblance to the fundamental theoretical stance of the phenomenological method: “To let what shows itself be seen from itself, just as it shows itself to itself” (*Das was sich zeigt, so wie es sich von ihm selbst her zeigt, von ihm selbst her sehen lassen*).³⁴

This fiction of a purely capitalist society allows pieces of knowledge to be forced into existence, precisely because this purely capitalist society expresses the tendential movement or directionality of commodification. Commodification is never a limited phenomenon: rather, every act of commodification contains within it the overall directionality of absolute commodification. This is, for instance, precisely why Deleuze and Guattari argue that philosophy’s role is directly political, not because one can make political judgments in theory, and then simply “apply” them to the political realm, but because philosophy itself is an experimental battlefield in which the relative deterritorializations that comprise the level of history can be “purified” or made absolute. In this way, the relative deterritorializations of the historical process can be generalized as a world in which absolute deterritorialization has been accomplished.³⁵ This produces a situation of the “the axiomatic deterritorialization of the world” or the “final phase of the transition from exo-colonization, capital’s annihilation of its own outside through its expansion across the earth, to endo-colonization, that is, the torsional invagination of capital’s movement of accumulation into its own interior, encompassing land and human beings themselves.”³⁶ In other words, this world of principle or pure capitalism is not a world in which there is a particularly savage capitalism; rather, this experimental world is

³⁴ Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*. (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1967), 34.

³⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, “Geophilosophy” in *What is Philosophy?*

³⁶ Nagahara Yutaka, “Teikoku aruiwa gunji Baberu: Gurobarizeshon to sekai naisen” in *Gendai shiso*, vol. 30 no. 1 (Tokyo: Seidosha, 2002), 187. On the terms *exo-colonialisation* and *endo-colonialisation*, see Paul Virilio, *L’insécurité du territoire* (Paris: Stock, 1975).

totally divested of all obstacles to capital's own self-movement and self-definition: "Not clean war with zero deaths, but pure war with zero births."³⁷ This experimental world can then be utilized in order to understand the tendential movements and operations of the historical world. As such, this practice of "forcing" on the basis of a completed fiction is itself directly political, precisely because it is a dislocation of the object across the levels of being: a political result in history is forced on the basis of a positing on the level of theory. The site of politicality that Uno identifies in this "positing," the set of questions contained in Marx's use of the term *setzen*, revolve around the commodity: "political economy can grasp the concrete relations that form a given society through the commodity, because these relations are 'presupposed' (*voraussetzen*) within the interior of the commodity form itself. Capital's theoretical system thus comes to be completed (*kanketsu*) by positing (*setzen*) within its own development itself the concrete relations which are 'pre-positing' (*voraussetzen*) as its point of departure (*shuppatsuten*)."³⁸ He follows this decisive point by identifying the double structure of referral between the theoretical object and the politicality of theory by pointing out the haunting of the inside by the outside:

A commodity economy always possesses this (im)possibility or "*nihil* of reason" (*muri*) insofar as it manages the relations among human beings as relations among things, but it is paradoxically the fact that this (im)possibility itself (*muri*) has developed as a form capable of ordering the totality of society that in turn renders possible our own theoretical systematization of its motion.³⁹

This impossibility therefore, is the site around which we can understand the relation of political economy to politics itself. Because of the contingency or undecidability of the

³⁷ Virilio, *The Information Bomb* (London: Verso, 2000), 145.

³⁸ Uno, "Keizaigaku ni okeru ronshō to jisshō" in *UKC*, vol. 4 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1974), 17.

³⁹ Uno, "Keizaigaku ni okeru ronshō to jisshō" in *UKC*, vol. 4 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1974), 19.

commodification of labor power, capital must reroute or recode this contingency as necessity, it must reorder the internal sequencing of elements of the purely contingent or fortuitous encounter so that these elements connote or come to disclose a necessity, an exigency. By filling the holes and ruptures in its austere motion, capital draws our attention to this impossibility for the first time. By mobilizing labor power in its ostensibly 'pure' circuit, capital tries to utilize this "phantasmic semblance that fills the irreducible ontological gap,"⁴⁰ but in doing so, it also exposes the politicality of its own so-called economic necessity. Resistance, the proletarian capacity to revolt against the system which produced it, is only capable of discovering itself as a resistance precisely because of the way in which capital tries to fold this resistance back into itself. In other words, the proletariat discovers that it has "nothing to lose but its chains" only through the experience of being divorced from the land in the process of primitive accumulation and forcibly reconstituted as the owner of a single thing: labor power which can be commodified. Through the insertion of this labor power commodity, the foundational input for capital's operation, the elementary form of resistance insinuates itself *within* the interior (capital's logic), and capital, in confronting the fact that it cannot itself produce this labor power commodity, is forced to plug up its own gaps with the material of this resistance. Thus the proletarian outside discovers for itself the openings for the project of communism only, paradoxically, by being exposed to the weaknesses and limitations of capital from the inside: it is not a pure absence, but an "indiscernible" element that structures the exchange between interior and exterior. Uno constantly emphasizes that capital is always something that appears "as if" it is a perfect cyclical self-contained

⁴⁰ Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London: Verso, 1999), 238.

object in motion. But it is precisely this “as if” that gives us a clue to the correlation between the outside in political economy and the outside of politics itself, this structure of forcing in which we encounter not only the potentiality of the “critique of political economy” but also the possibilities of the intervention.

The “revolution,” in other words, does not immediately eliminate those things that it would overcome, it rather “reduces” them to their “purest expressions” (*ihren reinsten Ausdruck*), it raises them to the level of “principle” in order to overthrow them. Thus the analysis of “pure capitalism,” rather than a depoliticized evasion of the concrete, is a theoretical *practice*, a practical and active measure taken to “reduce” the logic inherent in capitalism’s everyday dynamics to “its purest expression,” not simply in order to imagine the *scientificity* of this contaminated cycle, but precisely in order to allow it to “complete” itself “in order to be able to overthrow it.” This mechanism that Marx identifies with the revolution “traveling through purgatory,” is thus this strange amalgam whereby the immediate situation can only be apprehended by means of the “force of abstraction,” which in turn “inverts” or “reverses” itself into the most concrete elements. Already here, we are dealing with a question of “translation,” a question of the relationship of the logic of capital to the logical motion of theory itself: “Was it not the awareness of this very problematic which forced Marx to ‘translate’ economic concepts into other concepts which were to be ‘more’ than merely economic? And is it not the case that any translation of Marx’s concepts, which in truth would amount to a re-translation, would hide the very problem, which led to the development of a critical theory of economic categories in the first place? The problem is that intelligible, and yet in some sense ‘incomprehensible’, concepts prove to be only *apparently-intelligible*, which means

precisely that they are *unintelligible* concepts.”⁴¹ We will see how this “apparent intelligibility” that covers over or overcodes the fundamental unintelligibility of political economy stems from the dense overlapping or contamination between logic and history, a contamination that is mirrored or expressed in an interlocking manner with the political physics of theory itself.

The Axiomatic Traversal of the Limit

In precisely the sense that the goal of the psychoanalytic scenario is the “traversal of the fantasy,” the goal of the *critique* of political economy is the traversal of the fantasy of systematicity that political economy seeks to discover in capital’s axiomatic operation, a set of laws of motion that political economy *attempts to mirror in its own theoretical physics*. But what this “traversal” consists in must be extensively clarified. Here we will take another clue from Uno’s work and develop it in a specific theoretical direction: the question of *traversal*, *passing (through)*, *conduction*, the *conduit*, and the apparatuses that enable it. Uno writes:

Through the law of population, capitalism comes into possession of *mechanisms or apparatuses which allow the (im)possibility of the commodification of labor power to pass through* (‘*muri*’ *wo tōsu kikō*). This is precisely the point on which capitalism historically forms itself into a determinate form of society, and further, is what makes it independent in pure-economic terms. Like land, this is a so-called given for capitalism, one that is given from its exterior, but unlike land it can be reproduced, and by means of this reproduction becomes capable of responding to the demands of capital put forward through the specific phenomenon of capitalism called crisis.⁴²

⁴¹ Hans-Georg Backhaus, “Between Philosophy and Science: Marxian Social Economy as Critical Theory” in *Open Marxism I: History and Dialectics*, eds. W. Bonefeld, R. Gunn and K. Psychopedis (London: Pluto Press, 1992), 56.

⁴² Uno, “Benshōhōteki mujun ni tsuite” in *UKC*, vol. 10 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1974), 426-427.

Capitalism itself does not produce labor power, but rather produces assemblages or mechanisms (*kikō*) that “transmit” or “allow through” (*tōsu*) the effect of the (im)possibility, this folding back into itself. We know that because of the inherent incompleteness that inevitably-recurrently emerges whenever capital’s logic attempts to display itself as a perfect circle, this logic *should not* work, and yet it works perfectly well in capitalist society. This irrational moment or fundamental absence of reason that characterizes economic “rationality” itself presents us with a paradox, but equally poses for us a corollary theoretical problem. If capital’s logical cycle experiences some fundamental gap or rupture insofar as it can never operate without recourse to the “savage outside” that *should be* strictly excluded from the systematic inside, how does this logical movement *pass through* or *traverse* this gap, so that the cycle might appear whole? In fact, here we are confronted with a crucial conceptual innovation: capitalism as a historical society, a determinate form of social relations, is not distinguished simply by the form of the wage, the development of the productive forces and so forth, but rather by its capacity, as a “determinate form of society,” to produce, maintain, and utilize these “apparatuses” for the *traversal* of the (im)possibility.

The strict methodological difference between the logic of capital – its “principles” – and the history of capitalism – its stadial development – experiences a contamination or cross-fertilization precisely in the relations of force drawn by Uno around the “*muri*” of the commodification of labor power. This (im)possibility in effect shows us that the capture of the “extimate” energy of human labor in effect installs in capitalist society a compulsion to repeat the original-irrational moment of capture by which capitalist society locates its *arché*, but also which can never emerge in the historical world. In this way, the

impossibility of the origin must be repeated as the (im)possibility of commodification by means of what Uno called these “apparatuses for the traversing of the (im)possibility” above. It is only in the clarification of these “apparatuses” or “mechanisms” that we can clarify the political problem incarnated in this volatile amalgam of logic and history that is capitalist society. This question therefore moves us quickly to a theoretical formulation of the relation between the methodological level of the critique of political economy and the set of problems posed in the form of the agrarian question. Moreover, it is when we inquire into this question of *how* and *by what means* this “passing through” or traversal can be accomplished that another fundamental problem for Marxist theoretical inquiry returns to us with a sudden and dramatic force: the so-called “national question.” But where does this theoretical structure have its origin in Uno’s work? It shows us again the essential role of the agrarian question in “revealing,” “disclosing,” or “uncovering” these apparatuses that work precisely to ensure that an essentially *defective* logic⁴³ will nevertheless “work correctly” on the level of history.

Uno draws our attention not to the “feudal system” as such but to the “feudality” (*hōkensei*) of the rural village, in a specific and ideational form, what he called its “thought, sentiment, and custom.”⁴⁴ What he means by drawing our attention to this stratum of “feeling” or “affect” is to emphasize that the form of the apparatus that allows this (im)possibility of the commodification of labor power to push its motion forward, to

⁴³ On this point, see Yutaka Nagahara, *Warera kashi aru mono tachi: Han-‘shihon’ron no tame ni* (Tokyo: Seidosha, 2008) and particularly his analysis of the “defective circle” that must be repeatedly traced by means of the form of the *commencement*. Nagahara’s thesis – an absolutely original one that opens numerous theoretical possibilities for us – is that there is a formal order of three divergent forms of commencement or beginning in Marx. These three forms in turn can be related back to the three forms of the relative surplus population (floating, latent, and stagnant) outlined by Marx, another line of entry into the question of “origin.”

⁴⁴ See here Uno, “Waga kuni nōson no hōkensei” in *UKC* 8 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1974).

proceed without foundering on its own slippages, appears variously in the form of the nation-state, in form of local customs, in the form of “thought,” forms of connection, forms of encounter, forms of emotion, and so forth. This in turn stems from Uno’s *transversal* relation to the debate on Japanese capitalism: rather than taking any of the typical positions - the arguments that Japanese capitalism was permanently crippled by emerging from a feudal basis directly into a militarist form of industrial capital, or that seemingly feudal relations in the countryside were mere remnants withering away under capital’s homogenizing influence – Uno instead, through this concept of the apparatus of traversal (although he had not yet “formally” used this phrase), makes a much different point.

Instead, he argues, the apparent existence of feudal relations in the countryside was not an indication that the actual full-blown feudal system remained on a partial basis, or that these relations were merely atrophied “remnants,” but rather it indicated something much more complex: feudal relations or feudal “sentiments” were *“maintained precisely as a sacrifice that enabled Japanese capitalism to develop without resolving the problems it itself posited.”*⁴⁵ Let us note here that this paradoxical structure is exactly what he later referred to as an “apparatus for the traversal of the (im)possibility” (*‘muri’ wo tōsu kikō*). In other words, this structure, which Uno first locates in the problem of clarifying the question of the “survivals of feudalism” or “feudal remnants,” is not a question of “uneven development” or other rather obvious features of capitalist development on a world scale, it is instead a question in which the inner logic of theory overlaps with the logic that inheres in capital *as a social relation*,

⁴⁵ Uno, “Waga kuni nōson no hōkensei” in *UKC* 8 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1974), 55.

and exposes its basic contamination, which it nevertheless attempts to erase. That is, what we see here is the fundamental logical problem of how something that should function as an obstacle can be evaded without resolving the basis on which the obstacle emerged in the first place. To put it in different terms, the basic theoretical problem that Uno derives from the agrarian question, and which then functions later in his work as a kind of pivot or lever around which to expose capital's particular dementia, is this logic of the *traversal*, "passing," "passing through," the "conduit," and so forth. In other words, the question is not simply one of capital's (im)possibility, its fundamental "*nihil* of reason," rather the question is why the social relation called capital functions smoothly in an apparently rational and elegant circle *despite the fact that it should not function at all*, that its underlying *nihil* should expose this circle as a crippled and impossible circuit.

But how does this "traversal" itself function for capital? It functions as a "folding," a "pleating," a "turning inside out." In other words, it is not simply a "crossing over" or "leap." When we think of a leap, we imagine that there are two clear sides, two distinct fields, and that one passes from one side to the other. But capital's two leaps (the leap of the exchange process and the leap between one social basis or mode of production and another) never occur in such a neat fashion. Rather the leap is an *ideational* moment that "passes through," that is "conducted" through the situation by means of the apparatus, the device or mechanism. Or, more fundamentally, the "leap" or "inversion" is precisely what *creates* the two sides. By inverting, reversing, leaping, or "passing through," a planar surface or single topological field in extension is retroactively split into two, made to appear double, so that there becomes "this side" and "that side," so that the historical process appears to be grounded on a set of uneven substances that pre-exist

the moment when they are revealed. But prior to the moment of *traversal*, when a boundary or limit emerges that must be “passed through,” the boundary or limit would merely be located as one moment of a single planar horizon, not something that marks the gap between two sides. Thus what forms the gap, or what transforms the limit into a true break or abyss, is precisely the movement of passage, the traversal of the limit within the planar field. This passage transforms the limit into a *gradient* or “threshold of intensity” (*seuil d’intensité*)⁴⁶ after which point it continues to function in an ideational sense as the mark or breach between two surfaces, intersected now by a different field or exterior that *suspends* the previous extensive arrangement.

Capital thus names the social scenario according to which this planar surface’s limits are transformed into gaps, a social system of *the axiomatic traversal of the limit*, wherein the limit itself is incessantly-recurrently being *inverted* or *dis-placed* as a gradient or “threshold.” The intensity of this threshold is contained precisely in the fact that it is the *locus* or site of the “passing” of the (im)possibility, the moment wherein the (im)possibility is traversed and thereby “retrojected” as a gap or breach. Once again, this logic is a paradoxical system intimately (or more accurately “extimately”) linked to exteriority – not the substantial outside or the fantasy of an elsewhere, but the exteriority that characterizes the forms emerging under capitalism as *verrückt*, that is, both “demented” and “dis-placed,” or more centrally for our analysis “de-ranged,” that is, both “deranged” and “displaced” from a given “range” into another. It is this “displacement” or “dislocation” (both in the sense of an unexpected localization of phenomena and a “fault-line” or “crack”) in the tectonics of capitalism’s territorial expression, located not just in the form of the *state*, but in the state’s specific technology called “the nation,” that

⁴⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille plateaux* (Paris: Seuil, 1980), 71.

furnishes one of the central moments around which Uno expands and opens up the “political physics” of capital’s so-called “logic.”

When Marx specifically mentions that the form of value is itself continuously-recurrently expressed and concentrated “in dieser verrückten Form,”⁴⁷ he alerts us to something essential in this word “verrückt” or “Verrücktheit” (“insanity” but also “displacement”). In other words, it indicates “a mode of existence of social practice caught up in an ‘ongoing process’ of ‘inversion’.”⁴⁸ Here, in order to understand the particular “derangement” of capital that is concentrated in what Uno refers to as these “apparatuses for the traversal of the (im)possibility,” we ought to cross-read the emphasis on the centrality of the value-form as the ground of the specific *scientificity of critique* of Marxist theoretical research, and the program of “taking Marx from behind” undertaken by Deleuze and Guattari. Although their aesthetic and gestural modes of analysis diverge, they both locate the essence of the dynamics of capital in the “deranged forms” within which the form of value emerges (Backhaus), the specific “dementia” that emerges across every social surface intersected by capital (Deleuze and Guattari), and the traversal of the *seeming* (im)possibility of the commodification of labor power, an (im)possibility that is in fact *constantly being passed and passing through* (Uno). In fact, we should pay strict attention again to the double sense of this term “verrückt” as both “deranged” and “deranged,” that is, not only insane but also *transversal*, diagonal, moving across fields in “displacement,” whereby the expected arrangement of phenomena is punctuated,

⁴⁷ Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 in *MECW*, vol. 35 (New York: International Publishers, 1996), 87; Marx, *Das Kapital*, Bd. 1 in *MEW*, Bd. 23 (Berlin, Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED: Dietz Verlag), 90.

⁴⁸ Backhaus, “Between Philosophy and Science: Marxian Social Economy as Critical Theory” in *Open Marxism I: History and Dialectics*, eds. W. Bonefeld, R. Gunn and K. Psychopedis (London: Pluto Press, 1992), 60.

suspended, or interrupted by a schematic of arrangement (or de-rangement) that “ranges” divergently, placing unforeseen combinations into another order. This “Verrücktheit” of capital is exactly why Deleuze and Guattari emphasize that the schizophrenic is one “without epistemological guarantees,” one who follows a different arrangement of reality, “which encourages or allows one *to displace oneself* from one field to another” (*qui l'entraîne à se déplacer d'un plan à un autre*).⁴⁹

Both of these analyses of the “verrückt” (deranged) and “ver-rückt” (de-ranged) characteristics that inform the slippages or gaps between capital’s logic and the historical development of capitalist society find their ultimate expression in Uno’s analysis of the *muri*, the (im)possibility or “*nihil* of reason” that is nevertheless always “passing through.” In fact, we should recall that in the (im)possible origin of capital in the moment of the English enclosures, the secondary effect of the formation of the owner of the labor power commodity is to simultaneously create or formally produce the *vagabond*. In this sense, it is no accident that the formation of the modern “lumpenproletariat,” whose origin is found in the “beggars, robbers, and vagabonds” (*Bettler, Räuber, Vagabunden*) produced as a side-effect of the production of the *vogelfreie Proletariat* in the process of the so-called primitive accumulation, concerns the entire question of “range,” “ranging” and “de-ranging.” The lumpenproletariat is the purest expression of “feudal remnants” not in the sense that it is something “backwards” or “out of time,” but rather that it expresses the present concretization of the process of primitive accumulation or the transition *as a surface effect*, that is, it does not “repeat” this moment but keeps this moment circulating on the surface. What above all characterizes the later lumpenproletariat and early “vagabond” is precisely that they “range across fields”

⁴⁹ Deleuze, *L’île déserte: Textes et entretiens 1953-1974* (Paris: Minuit, 2002), 328.

(Deleuze & Guattari), that they “wander about” (hence the legal declaration: “Eine *herumwandernde* und bettelnde Person wird für einen Landstreicher und Vagabunden erklärt” (“Any one *wandering about* and begging is declared a rogue and a vagabond”).⁵⁰ In other words, the “de-rangement” of capital’s logic, its “deranged forms,” are produced as a result of the contamination between the (im)possible origin of capital and the (im)possibility of the commodification of labor power, a volatile amalgam held together and yet retained as a gap by the traversal itself:

Obviously the processes of the emergence of capitalism, its maturation, and especially its decline, all appear as processes specific to each individual country. Generally speaking, it can be said that the processes experienced by countries that have seen the development of capitalism earlier will basically be repeated as an identical process in countries experiencing a late transition to capitalism. *This expresses to us the fact that the principles of political economy, or the logic that inheres in capital, is only realized or achieved by passing through the historical process (genri ga rekishiteki katei wo tōshite kantetsu shite iru koto)*, revealing its various phases precisely through the temporal period of the transition to capitalism.⁵¹

Here is where the inner *topology* of the logic and the outer *cartography* of history are linked, sealed, interlocked as surfaces on the *torus* of capital. But why is this theoretical direction so crucial? What is the exigency for the analysis of this contamination, this operation of the traversal?

Uno gives us another clue: “this is precisely because I think that unless we purify the theory of principle latent in *Capital* to the extent that it can be utilized in the analysis of imperialism, and in relation to questions such as that of Japanese capitalism, it will be impossible to avoid lapsing into formalism, and a realization of effective cooperation

⁵⁰ Marx, *Das Kapital*, Bd. 1 in *MEW*, Bd. 23 (Berlin, Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED: Dietz Verlag), 764.

⁵¹ Uno, *Kyōkōron* in UKC, vol. 5 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1974), 141.

between economics and research in other areas of social science and cultural knowledge will be impossible. It is this theoretical process that will open new paths for the settling of the theory of the principles of political economy itself.”⁵²

Topologies of the Critique of Political Economy: Torsion and Inversion

*The maximum of Marxism = (Umschlag).*⁵³

- Lenin

Having arrived at the problem of the traversal of the *nihil* of reason that paradoxically characterizes capital’s arrogated “rationality,” let us return to the following statement of Lacan, quoted in the epigraph: “the fact is that science, if one looks at it closely, has no memory. Once constituted, it forgets the circuitous path by which it came into being (*elle oublie les péripéties dont elle est née*).”⁵⁴ Here, we need to pay close attention to the term *péripéties* – the “circumstances,” “adventures,” the “incidents” or “events,” the “twists and turns” of the plot, so to speak. But this seemingly unimportant or cursory term in Lacan’s statement turns out to be nothing less than the pivotal term around which the putatively “scientific” circle of capital’s logic operates. *Peripeteia* in classical Greek narrative analysis refers to the sudden or dramatic change in circumstances, a *reversal*, an instantaneous and unexpected “plot twist.” In other words, it connotes the tragic, comic, or absurd moment when an expected set of relations or

⁵² Uno, “Kyōkō no hitsuzensei wa ika ni shite ronshō sareru beki ka” in *UKC*, vol. 4 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1974), 144.

⁵³ V.I. Lenin, “Plan for a Report on the Seventh (April) All-Russia Conference of the RSDLP(B) at a Meeting of the Petrograd Organisation, May 8 (21), 1917” in *Collected Works*, vol. 36 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1971), 451.

⁵⁴ Lacan, “La science et la vérité” in *Écrits*, t. 2 (Paris: Seuil, 1966), 349-350.

phenomena is suddenly revealed to have transformed into its inverse, when a set of circumstances has somewhat *folded inside out*. The pretensions to “science” of economics, as a pure cyclical set of laws of motion mirroring the exchange process, must always violently “forget” the contingencies of the historical process in order to imagine itself as a rationality, as a pure logic. That is, once constituted, the “science” of political economy “forces” itself to ignore or elide the fact that it came into being by imitating in its theoretical structure the “deranged” nature of capital itself, which pretends to be a pure interiority while constantly having recourse to the historical process in order to retain and reproduce its dynamism. In this sense, the critique of political economy consists in the *restoration* or “re-remembering” of these *péripiéties* that “science” would seek to exclude from its image of itself, to take these “secret” undercurrents and rather than erase them, instead raise them up to the level of the “world of principle” itself.

A very specific term in Marx’s work functions in the style of this *peripeteia*, a term that links together the deranged logic of capital with the pretensions to “rationality” of the “dismal science” of economics. This term is also at first glance something cursory or unremarkable, the term *Umschlag*. In Marx’s work, this term is used in two divergent senses: on the one hand, it simply means the “turnover” of capital, that is, the process through which capital is advanced and subsequently returns; on the other hand, this term is utilized in the *Grundrisse* manuscripts to indicate the movement of “inversion” or “reversal” whereby, through “a peculiar logic, the right of property is dialectically inverted (*dialektisch umschlägt*), so that on the side of capital it becomes the right to an alien product, or the right of property over alien labour, the right to appropriate alien labour without an equivalent, and, on the side of labour capacity [*Arbeitsvermögens*], it

becomes the duty to relate to one's own labour or to one's own product as to *alien property*.⁵⁵ He continues:

The 'inversion' or 'reversal' [*Umschlag*] therefore comes about because the ultimate stage of free exchange is the exchange of labour capacity [*Arbeitsvermögens*] as a commodity, as value, for a commodity, for value; because it is given in exchange as objectified labour, while its use value, by contrast, consists of living labour, i.e. of the positing of exchange value. This 'inversion' or 'reversal' [*Umschlag*] arises from the fact that the use value of labour capacity, as value, is itself the value-creating element; the substance of value, and the value-increasing substance. In this exchange, then, the worker receives the equivalent of the labour time objectified in him, and gives his value-creating, value-increasing living labour time. He sells himself as an effect. He is absorbed and incarnated into the body of capital [*wird er absorbiert vom und inkarniert in das Kapital*] as a cause [*Ursache*], as activity [*Tätigkeit*]. Thus the exchange turns into its opposite, and the laws of private property -- liberty, equality, property -- property in one's own labour, and free disposition over it -- turn into the worker's propertylessness and the dispossession of his labour [*Eigentumslosigkeit des Arbeiters und Entäußerung seiner Arbeit*], [i.e.] the fact that he relates to it as alien property and vice versa.⁵⁶

This *Umschlag*, in other words, is a *topological* description of the traversal of the (im)possibility, a description of *how* something that appears as a limit is recreated, recoded, and re-deployed as a *gradient* of intensity for capital's functioning. This *Umschlag*, also simply the term for an "envelope," literally "envelopes" the outside by turning it "inside out," torsionally folding it in on itself, so that what should operate as a gap can be dialectically "leaped," but also burrowed into, emptied out, transformed from an *apparent* depth into a volatile surface. It is no accident that the exchange process, the process of the buying and selling of labor power is not something punctuated by limits as

⁵⁵ Marx, *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* in *MEW*, Bd. 42 (Berlin, Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED: Dietz Verlag, 1983), 370-371; Marx, *Economic Manuscripts of 1857-1858* [Grundrisse] in *MECW*, vol. 28, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1986), 386-387.

⁵⁶ Marx, *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* in *MEW*, Bd. 42 (Berlin, Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED: Dietz Verlag, 1983), 575; Marx, *Economic Manuscripts of 1857-1858* [Grundrisse] in *MECW*, vol. 29, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1987), 64.

such: these limits or gaps between seller and buyer are torsionally inverted or penetrated into only in order to recalibrate themselves as one smooth surface on which will occur “der flüssige Umschlag von Verkauf und Kauf” (‘the fluid “reversal” or “inversion” of sale and purchase’).⁵⁷ In fact, although we typically describe capital’s motion as a “circuit process” (*Kreislaufsprozeß*) and therefore as a circle, what is actually happening is not a circle at all. It is a topological *folding* and *unfolding*, through which the interior surface and the exterior surface can be interlocked in a planar field, it appears therefore as a *torus*: “Capital appears as this dynamic unity (*prozessierende Einheit*) of production and circulation, a unity which can be considered both as the totality (*Ganze*) of its production process and as the particular process through which capital goes during *a single* turnover (*bestimmter Verlauf e i n e s Umschlags des Kapitals*), *a single* movement returning to itself (*e i n e r i n sich selbst zurückkehrenden Bewegung*).”⁵⁸ That is, *capital itself* is, in essence, this *Umschlag*, this inversion or torsion on itself, which names the cyclical course by which it goes through a single motion of its torsional pattern, its *Kreislaufsprozeß*, not merely in a flat circle, but in a topological opening out onto and simultaneous folding into itself. But, and this again is why capitalism is so purely demented, deranged, and de-ranged, capital is only capable of expressing itself as the logic towards which it is compelled in a *single* cycle. Once the cycle ends, this torsional movement of inversion finds that, in order to repeat itself, it must traverse the historical outside, it must appeal to the “apparatuses” for the traversal of this (im)possibility that

⁵⁷ Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 in *MECW*, vol. 35 (New York: International Publishers, 1996), 140; Marx, *Das Kapital*, Bd. 1 in *MEW*, Bd. 23 (Berlin, Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED: Dietz Verlag), 144.

⁵⁸ Marx, *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* in *MEW*, Bd. 42 (Berlin, Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED: Dietz Verlag, 1983), 520; Marx, *Economic Manuscripts of 1857-1858* [Grundrisse] in *MECW*, vol. 29, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1987), 8.

lies at the boundary or edge of every circuit-process, every cycle of exchange in capitalist society, the hole at the center of the torus. Therefore, capital's compulsion to repeat always undermines its own attempt to appear as a logic, precisely because this logic is only able to legitimate itself in the form of a single circuit. This is exactly what Marx identifies in the question of "turnover," this moment of inversion/turnover that traces the outline of the maximal limit of capital's ability to grasp its outside *as if* it were a pure moment of the inside: "the production process itself is posited as determined by exchange, so that the social relation and the dependence on this relation (*die gesellschaftliche Beziehung und Abhängigkeit von dieser Beziehung*) in immediate production is posited not merely as a material moment, but as an *economic* moment, a determination of form (*Formbestimmung*)." This moment that should be impossible, the presentation of the social relation *as if* it were a derivation from the exchange process, in which social relationality is simply determined as the exchange of things, in this sense also expresses "the maximum of circulation (*Das Maximum der Zirkulation*), the limit (*die Grenze*) of the renewal of the production process through it."⁵⁹

It is in turn this "torsion" or inversion that reminds us to torsionally invert this deranged logic back upon "economics," back upon the simple mirroring of capital's quasi-logic as a "rational" explanatory mechanism. It is in fact this *Umschlag* that economics, following capital's own model faithfully, generally conceals or covers over. That is, when confronted with a "sudden inversion" (*plötzliche Umschlagen*), something that appears as the glimmer of the irrational outside within the putatively rational inside, the

⁵⁹ Marx, *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* in *MEW*, Bd. 42 (Berlin, Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED: Dietz Verlag, 1983), 528; Marx, *Economic Manuscripts of 1857-1858* [Grundrisse] in *MECW*, vol. 29, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1987), 16.

“agents of circulation” (*die Zirkulationsagenten*), or perhaps “economic fantasists,” become overawed by “the impenetrable mystery surrounding their own relations” (*dem undurchdringlichen Geheimnis ihrer eigenen Verhältnisse*).⁶⁰ This is not only because the confrontation with the traversal of the (im)possibility exposes the insanity of the image of capitalist society as a mere enlargement of the supposedly smooth and rational exchange process, it is also because Marx’s critique, and Uno’s development and recoding of this critique, is aimed not at capital’s logic itself, but at *the discourse of political economy*. It is not itself “an” economics. It is a critical explosion of the way in which political economy “buys into” capital’s own fantasy, its dream-like attempt to arrogate itself as a logic. Thus “the economic is in this sense the object itself of Marx’s ‘critique’: it is a representation (at once necessary and illusory) of real social relations. Basically it is only the fact of this *representation* that the economists abstractly explicate, which is inevitably already shared *practically* by the owners-exchangers (*propriétaires-échangistes*) of commodities, that the ‘economic’ relations appear as such, in an apparent natural autonomy. The representation is implicated in the very form of the *manifestation* of social relations. This is precisely what enables producers-exchangers to *recognize themselves* in the image that the economists present of them. The ‘representation’ of the economic is thus for Marx essential to the economic itself, to its real functioning and therefore to its conceptual definition.”⁶¹

⁶⁰ Marx, *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* in *MEW*, Bd. 42 (Berlin, Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED: Dietz Verlag, 1983), 365; Marx, *Economic Manuscripts of 1857-1858* [Grundrisse] in *MECW*, vol. 29, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1987), 378-379.

⁶¹ Étienne Balibar, “Sur la dialectique historique: Quelques remarques critiques à propos de *Lire le capital*” in *Cinq études du matérialisme historique* (Paris: Maspero, 1974), 213.

Marx himself reminds us that the scientificity of critique should never be confused with the pretension to “scientific rationality,” but rather indicates an entirely different modality of analysis: “the weak points (*die Mängel*) of the abstract materialism of natural science, from which the historical process is excluded, are at once evident from the abstract and ideological conceptions (*Vorstellungen*) of its spokesmen, whenever they venture out beyond their own speciality.”⁶² In other words, the scientificity implied in Uno’s analysis is not something of this type, precisely because, as we have seen, Uno fundamentally argues that the scientificity of capital is in fact *always* traversed or bisected by the historical process, that it is always contaminated with the effects of this traversal. This is why he alerts us to the fact that “the term ‘scientific’ in ‘scientific socialism’ is not something merely impressed on us by *Capital*: rather we ourselves must seek this ‘scientificity’ that Marx sought.”⁶³ By drawing our attention to the fact that the scientificity specific to capital always appears in the “de-ranged form” of something that must both exclude the historical process and simultaneously come into existence only as a result of it, Uno in essence exposes not only the absence of reason that characterizes capital’s narrative of itself, he also indirectly exposes us to the profound irrationality of the putatively “rational science” of political economy itself:

In fact, the commodity itself, as the point of departure for the theoretical system of political economy – even if only grasped as an abstract concept stemming from the analysis of the actual situation of a society that has not completely transitioned to capitalism – is what establishes the general basis of the commodification of labor power in tandem with the simplification and genericization of labor through capitalism’s development itself; through this process, it accelerates in the direction of the realization of a purely capitalist society, and further, displays itself in a sense as an independent commodity society established through the

⁶² Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 in *MECW*, vol. 35 (New York: International Publishers, 1996), 375-6n2; Marx, *Das Kapital*, Bd. 1 in *MEW*, Bd. 23 (Berlin, Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED: Dietz Verlag), 393n.89.

⁶³ Uno, *Shihonron ni manabu* (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1975), 41.

force of its own development. As a result, political economy can grasp the concrete relations that form a given society through the commodity, because these relations are “presupposed” (*voraussetzen*) within the interior of the commodity form itself. The theoretical system thus comes to be completed by positing (*setzen*) within its own development itself the concrete relations which are “preposited” (*voraussetzen*) as its point of departure.⁶⁴

Thus, we see precisely how, in Uno’s terms, the systematic and demented structure of capital also furnishes the theoretical architecture of the system of political economy. That is, because political economy itself relies on the same “deranged forms” as capital itself but “de-ranges” them into its motion, the same “forgetting” of the “circuitous path by which it was born,” the critical restoration of these *péripéties* that are desperately erased from the inside serves to *politically* undermine the entire expression of political economy itself. In other words, Uno’s forces on the paradox of the absolute *nihil* of reason that is always passing through the most apparently rational moment, the exchange process, exposes and uncovers political economy’s deranged mode of operation, the way in which the “agents of circulation” actively forget their own “mystery.”

This “enveloping” function or *Umschlag* serves as the “maximum” point of the circulation process, in which this systematicity is both disclosed and exposed as demented, and ultimately is folded “inside out” or inverted into another instance. In turn, this *Umschlag*, which furnishes the pivotal point of the theoretical and systematic process of thought-experimentation, also serves in Lenin’s strange note as the “maximum” of Marxism itself. This must remind us therefore of the essential homology between the “maximum of Marxism” and the “maximum of circulation,” the fact that the possibility of the transformation of critique into political motion is a process in which the true “principle” of capitalist society, its “de-ranged” and “demented” nature, is *politically*

⁶⁴ Uno, “Keizaigaku ni okeru ronshō to jisshō” in *UKC 4* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1974), 17.

raised to the level of principle so that its final de-ranging can occur. In this sense, when Uno reminds us that the smooth and elegant logic of capital's interior is only ever set in motion by means of its traversals of the historical outside in the volatile instance of the agrarian question, he also reminds us that what is at stake in the analysis of capital, in its theoretical modeling, is never simply the description or mirroring of this quasi-logic. Political economy often attempts to discover the "rational kernel" in this logic: yet "the *critique* of political economy is not the mere description of this existing fact, but the analysis of its genesis."⁶⁵ When we confront the de-ranged origin and reproduction of capital's logical functioning, we are also confronting the political physics and boundaries of our own theoretical representations of these phenomena, representations that are implicated already in the inner laws of capital's movement, in its demented forms of presupposition (*Voraussetzung*). In turn, it is precisely through the recurrent and endless analysis of the *genesis* of this dementia that we are constantly reminded of the volatile force, both dangerous and precious, of the historical outside, the space wherein the political capacity to implode capital's circuit-process remains an ever-present undercurrent of all social existence. In order to expand this "genesis" and its *figuration*, let us now turn towards the question of the *aesthetic*, and two specific traces of this figuration of genesis in the forms of the poem and the film.

⁶⁵ Backhaus, "On the Dialectics of the Value-Form" in *Thesis Eleven*, no. 99 (1980), 104.

5. The Primal Energy of Origin: On Tanigawa Gan

The courage of poetry means: courage to abandon
the mythological, to break with it and deconstruct it.
It is the courage to invent poetry, to configure the Poem
as the testimonial (*témoignage*) that it is.¹

- P. Lacoue-Labarthe

詩は手段とはならぬ
君 間違えるな
The poem is not a means
Listen – don't make this mistake.²

- Tamura Ryūichi

We have seen in previous chapters the essential role played by the concept of origin in the history of Marxist theoretical work in modern Japan. In order to presume the historical necessity of the “perverted” or permanently distorted form of the transition to capitalism in Japan, the origin must always be presumed or presupposed. In this sense, it typically formed a tautology: Japanese capitalism could be identified as a “type” on the basis that “Japan” itself could be easily presumed, some proto-national element that would confer a specific set of features onto the local expression of capital, forcing it onto a specific path with specific contours. This logic, because it presumes the strong and given existence of the “national” element, is always itself involved with a concept of *image* – here we should think of the older concept of the *imago mundi* or “image of the

References in this chapter to works of Tanigawa are to the following editions: *Tanigawa Gan no shigoto*, 2 vols. (Tokyo: Kawade Shobō, 1996), hereafter abbreviated as *TGS I & II*; *Tanigawa Gan serekushon*, 2 vols., eds. Iwasaki Minoru and Yonetani Masafumi (Tokyo: Nihon keizai hyōronsha, 2009), hereafter abbreviated *TGSL I & II*.

¹ Phillipe Lacoue-Labarthe, “Le courage de la poésie” in *Heidegger, la politique du poème* (Paris: Galilée, 2002), 151-152.

² Tamura Ryūichi, “Seibuen shokan” in *Tamura Ryūichi zenshishū* (Tokyo: Shichōsha, 2000).

world.” The decisive point is not that everything is solved by simply pointing out that the origin does not exist, or that its fictive character can be sorted out by merely referring to it as an “image.” Rather, what is critical in the concept of origin is that it operates precisely because it is an *image*, precisely because it is a product of elements gathered into a signification that corresponds and creatively-formatively interacts with the social and historical circumstances within which it arose. The former European *imago mundi* could never be said to have existed in the cosmological or geological sense, but for all that, it was no less *real*. The world of significations in which human beings lived, in which they formed institutions, encountered and practiced in historical circumstances, were all linked to the *concrete reality* of the *imago mundi*. This is precisely because *the origin exists as a figuration*, it operates in concrete reality and can never be reduced simply to “false consciousness.” Capitalist society cannot exist without the form of value, which itself can never be found somewhere materially – but this does not mean that value lacks a material basis; quite the opposite. In this sense, then, we must now investigate *how* the origin is figured, how this “absent cause” that appears as the fulcrum of the national question is formed. In this sense, what is at stake now is a question of *poetics*, of *poiesis*, of creation and invention. On this point, we will turn to the poetic work of Tanigawa Gan.

* * *

Although frequently overlooked outside specialized studies of the genesis of the New Left in Japan, Tanigawa Gan’s thought, literature, and poetry has been a decisive influence on postwar intellectual and political life. Largely associated with one of the

other major influences on the New Left, Yoshimoto Taka'aki, Tanigawa however was never a participant in the New Left movement itself, and had by its height in the late 1960s essentially retired from intellectual engagements. His work nevertheless remains a critical index of postwar social and political imagination, not only for its documenting of a specific trend inaugurated in the 1950s, but also for its conceptual echoes and reverberations today, in the continuing relevance and recurrent power of his analyses.

In the immediate postwar period, the Japan Communist Party, reinvigorated after decades of governmental repression, bloomed and flourished as a source of resistance politics and intellectual organizational force. In the early 1950s, the political logic around which the JCP had theorized its position began to change towards the form of a “national liberation” struggle, an armed struggle for liberation from “subordination” inspired by the Chinese revolutionary line, largely touted by certain JCP leaders, in particular Tokuda Kyūichi, who had spent the war years in exile in the Yenan “red base” areas with the Chinese revolutionary forces. They emphasized in particular the continuance, rather than rupture, of earlier land relations that had obtained in the Japanese countryside, what they described as a “parasitic landlord system” (*kisei jinushisei*): with this as the decisive backbone of the subjugation of the “nation,” the JCP began an ill-fated movement of returning to the villages. This took the form of the quasi-clandestine “Village Operations Corps” (*Sanzon kōsakutai*), groups of cadre and students who would enter the villages, agitate among the peasants, and attempt to foment a revolutionary spark in the countryside (Mao’s “a single spark can start a prairie fire”) in order to sow the seeds of an “encircling of the cities.” This movement was doomed from the start, not only because the peasants were by and large completely uninterested in the movement, but also

because their conditions, although still mired in appalling poverty, had been shifted by the postwar land reforms, enough at least to diminish the direct “parasitism” they faced, and thus enough to render ineffective the “operations corps” call for revolutionary action.³

This moment, however, was certainly more than merely a failed political strategy: although the JCP soon disowned the return to the village as “ultra-left adventurism” (*kyokusa bōkenshugi*) and officially shifted the line of the party in 1955 at its Sixth Congress, the material and affective memory of the village operations remained a critical site of literary politics, of political inspiration, and of imagination and experimentation throughout the decade of the 1950s and well into the subsequent years. It was also these years of the 1950s which saw the growth of an unofficial socialist movement, an extra-party left which neither followed the JCP and its concomitant Kōza faction historiographical standpoint, nor the mainstream intellectual strand of “left opposition” in the form of the remnants of the prewar Rōnō faction in the Socialist Party, and its own orthodox Marxism. Instead, many groups and figures sprang up to examine the “native” or local elements in the Japanese conjuncture under a new light. Classically for the Kōza faction (and thereby the JCP), these native traditions and folkways were emblems of the “semi-feudal semi-serf” debased and incomplete form of the Japanese social formation with its excessively “peculiar and inverted characteristics,”⁴ and were reminders of the supposedly “backward” and low political consciousness of the villages. For the Rōnō faction, the same basic point obtained, although for them, these “remnants” were no

³ On the *sansei kōsakutai*, see J. Victor Koschmann, *Revolution and Subjectivity in Postwar Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), esp. 224-225.

⁴ See Yamada Moritarō, *Nihon shihonshugi bunseki* [The Analysis of Japanese Capitalism, 1934] in *Yamada Moritarō chosakushū*, vol. 2 (Iwanami Shoten, 1983), 5. On Yamada, see chapters one through four.

longer tethered to a social system, but were gradually withering away under the aegis of the hegemonic form of industrial capital which was revolutionizing all social relations it encountered.⁵

But these competing orthodoxies had largely remained uninterested and dismissive of the rural poor themselves, the folkways and native practices of the isolated villages, who had been the source of premodern uprisings and fluid, nomadic social positions.⁶ Thus by the time Tanigawa's sustained decade of engagement emerged, in the mid-1950s to early 1960s, there was a general trend expressed in literature, in social thought, and in new political projects away from the orthodoxies which found it so easy to dismiss the native "subaltern" traditions of the Japanese situation. Tanigawa's project, while closely connected to this general milieu, is also primarily concerned with cross-reading these "traditions" with the line of writing itself, with the politics of the poetic, the political physics inherent in the act of inscription. Therefore, I think that we will see Tanigawa configure what I will identify as his "archi-ethical"⁷ praxis, his complex (and also problematic) figuration of the people as origin through the poetic/poietic inscription, the material force of his writing. The people, this enigmatic "them," is not a given, they are not "here." But the people is a force, and wellspring of something multidirectional,

⁵ See Sakisaka Itsurō's devastating and representative critique of Yamada (and Kōza faction orthodoxy) in his "*Nihon shihonshugi bunseki ni okeru hōhōron*" [Methodology in The Analysis of Japanese Capitalism, 1935] in *Nihon shihonshugi no shomondai* (Ōdosha, 1948).

⁶ For a recent brief discussion of Tanigawa's grasp of the village in relation to the history of the debate on Japanese capitalism, see Satō Izumi, "Kyōdōtai no saisōzō: Tanigawa Gan no 'mura'" [Reimagining Community: Tanigawa Gan's 'Village'] in *Nihon bungaku* 56-11 (November 2007), 36-37 and Mizutamari Mayumi, "Tanigawa Gan no kyōdōtairon to saakuru kōsō" [Tanigawa Gan's Theory of Community and Conception of the 'Circle' Movement] in two parts in *Shisō* 1021, 1022 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, May and June 2009).

⁷ I utilize this term from Lacoue-Labarthe, "Le courage de la poésie" in *Heidegger, la politique du poème*, op. cit.

not something teleological, but rather something that produces lines of sensation, myth, and affect. But this figure of “the people” is also not a unidirectional site from which we take comfort, or find as a refuge, because the “I” is also the site from which the people are created as a people. For Tanigawa, the people is a work, an operation, a figuration. It is an operation which both inscribes the “I” into the *socius*, and an independent flow which the “I” inscribes into the origin.

* * *

The specifically *literary* politics of Tanigawa’s work are complex – his texts largely defy genre-categorization, as many of his critical writings are themselves intended to intersect and cross-pollinate with his poetry. Because he wrote extensively for a condensed, short period, however, the thematic bases of this body of work are consistent, even univocal across their formal contours. What is essential to this body of work is its constantly regenerated matrix of statements and flows around the two axes of the internal colonization of the countryside, the process of what can be called “endocolonization,”⁸ and the haunting, invisible yet immanent “energy” which issues from the “point of origin.” These two poles, that is, the origin and its capture, are suffused with another problematic that is vital in Tanigawa’s work: the structure of the double, the doublet, doubling, and the possibility of intervention into the circuit of the double bind. This multidirectional zone of inquiry is for Tanigawa at the core of the articulation not only of new political projects, but of the structure of engagement of the self, the conditions of

⁸ On the concept of endocolonization, see Paul Virilio, *L’insécurité du territoire* (Paris: Stock, 1975).

possibility for the intervention of the “I” on an actual-historical basis, a basis that nevertheless stems from the poetic act of *writing* which writes the “I” into existence and that loops back to the “I” in the form of “the people” (*minshū*).

Perhaps Tanigawa’s most famous work, the 1954 “Genten ga sonzai suru” asks a series of decisive questions throughout the essay; interspersed into the text are direct questions in a repeating form, direct calls to the other, the “you”:

“You, will you refuse to wag your tail?”
(汝、尾をふらざるか。)
“You, go ‘over there’ and see ‘them’. Can you know them?”
(汝、彼処にゆきて彼等を見しや。彼等を知れるか。)
“You, will you trace the earth underfoot?”
(汝、足下の大地を画くか。)
“You, do you hope for the survival of humanity?”
(汝、人類の生存を望むか。)

This repeating series of questions or injunctions confronts us rhetorically: where does this energy, the questioning consciousness that here bids the “other” to take up the project come from? Is this “you” the other? Is this you a stranger? And what is this series of gestures: “refusal,” “there,” “tracing” or “inscribing,” “the earth,” “survival,” “humanity,” and so on? They cycle around the questions of the exterior, that which has been lost, the sterility and abyssal fact of survival, the possibility of resistance, the encounter with the other, the remnants and traces inscribed in the ground. In short, Tanigawa’s text is exemplary for its poetic *performance of the origin*, its repeated and cyclical calling to and figuration of the point of origin as the point of the line of writing itself. This origin and its accompanying tropes cycle around the other as a gathered figure, the masses, the people, the tribe. He writes, “The people (*hitobito*) are far away. And they’re affecting me, moving me (*watashi o ugokashite iru*). They have the right to do so. Why? Because I affect them too. Who is this – them? I can’t hear their voices, I

can't touch them, but this “them” even controls my death (*watashi no shi sura shihai shiteiru*).”⁹ This “they” is ambiguous: “they” cannot be heard, they cannot be touched, but they control “my” death. In short the “they” is the work, the traces, the remnants of writing itself, the material after-effects which constantly perform a type of capture in returning to their putative origin in the “I.” The work in this sense is an apparatus which cannot be de-worked (*désœuvrée*) from the standpoint of the “I,” because it is precisely this standpoint which it flows back towards, but discovers is inadequate to its demands for an origin: the death of the “I” is not the limit-condition for the “they,” rather the “they” is the limit-condition for the formation, maintenance, and dissolution of the “I.”

Tanigawa asks, “Where are the 'mothers' of the twentieth century? Where is that lonely place, that road that hasn't been walked, that road that cannot be walked (*aruita mono no nai, arukarenu michi*)? Where are the dark and hot depths (*shinbu*) fermented and germinated in the fundamental themes of the present? Isn't it there that we find the 'origin' of the coordinates of the poet? (*shijin no zahyō no 'genten'*)”¹⁰ The origin is that space which cannot be traversed, which cannot be inhabited, but towards which we are nevertheless driven, because it contains the “coordinates” (*zahyō*) of the poet. What are these “coordinates,” these lines and operations which are “regulated in tandem” for the poet? The poet is the one who inscribes the origin, who writes it into location, who inscribes the blank page with the line and the trace. But the “work” then finds its origin only in recurring back to its conditions of production, to the “I” of the poet, a loop which never meets its point of departure but continues its recurrent, torsional movement.

Thus Tanigawa warns us that “we shouldn’t be too quick to try to find ourselves

⁹ Tanigawa Gan, “Genten ga sonzai suru,” [The Point of Origin Exists] originally published in *Boin*, no. 18 (May 1954), *TGS* I: 63.

¹⁰ Tanigawa, “Genten ga sonzai suru,” *TGS* I: 63.

directly in the origin. After all, you cannot linger there forever. The origin is not merely an *idea*. A person who wants to turn towards the origin must first thoroughly investigate their own coordinates (*ono ga zahyō*), the content of the class to which they belong (*shozoku suru kaikyū no naiyō*), and must determine the direction in which their own power operates (*ono ga chikara no hataraku hōkō*). We aren't writing by facing the future, we write towards a present that is progressing towards the future (*mirai e susumu genzai*). Eliminate the idols! Smash idealist workerism (*kannenteki rōdōshashugi*)! Trace the depths of the earth that is under our feet today! (*Kyō no daichi no mizukara no ashimoto no shinbu o kake!*)”¹¹ There is a certain politicality in Tanigawa's texts which is intentionally naïve, a kind of signpost that marks and outlines the contours of the double engagement operating in his texts and its ambivalence. The origin can only be approached through the investigation of one's own coordinates. In other words, it is not a projection in the form of application (the problem of both Kōza and Rōnō faction Marxisms, as Uno Kōzō incessantly points out, is the ideological and conceptual conflation of theory and history, such that *Capital* becomes an ahistorical object or formula which is then “applied” to the concrete, but which paradoxically privileges the apparently quasi-pure concrete experience of English capitalist development).¹² The application of the formula for the general tendency onto the putatively concrete unity means that the origin (its “coordinates”) always becomes conflated with a material-historical block on the generality: the “origin” thus becomes “Japan” as object, a unitary “Japan” which is always too late to the stage of history. Tanigawa instead redirects us to the poietic figuration of the origin, the examination of one's “own power,” that

¹¹ Tanigawa, “Genten ga sonzai suru,” *TGS* I: 64.

¹² See his reflections in the mid-1950s on the prewar debate in “Nihon shihonshugi ronsō to wa nani ka” in *Uno Kōzō chosakushū*, supplemental volume [*bekkan*] (Iwanami Shoten, 1974).

mysterious and impossible site of origin which is the “I,” towards which the productions of the “I” cannot flow back.

“There was nothing we could do but gradually fall. The leap isn’t produced subjectively (*Hiyaku wa shukanteki ni umarenai*). Down towards the bottom (*kabu*), towards the bottom, down to the roots (*kon*), to the roots, towards where no flowers bloom, towards the place awash in darkness, there is the mother of all things, the origin of being (*sonzai no genten*). There is the primal energy (*shohatsu no enerugii*).”¹³ Everything in Tanigawa’s writing is moving from the visible to the invisible, not the other way around. It is a downward movement, a movement towards chaos, towards the obscure, the undefined, the “energy” which can be sensed but not directly touched. Again we see here the repetition for Tanigawa: when you reach the bottom, you move towards another bottom. When you have found what you imagine to be the root, there is still another root. It is in fact this movement itself which is the origin, the rhythmic source of the “primal energy” (*shohatsu no enerugī*). The origin thus is not a site, but rather is contained as a constantly repeating torsional substratum of the movement towards the depths, the line according to which the movement operates. This is precisely why he describes this as a “microscopic ideal of the ‘origin,’ (‘*genten*’ to *iu kyokubi no kannen*)”¹⁴ a miniscule and receding trace rather than a fixed site in its plenitude, “a kind of sampling or citation/summoning” that is of the origin but is itself “without origin.”¹⁵

We ought to be careful not to imagine the downward motion of this movement as a

¹³ Tanigawa, “Genten ga sonzai suru,” *TGS* I: 64.

¹⁴ Tanigawa, afterword to the *Gendai shichōsha* edition of *Genten ga sonzai suru* (July 7, 1963), *TGS* II: 474.

¹⁵ Nagahara Yutaka, “Iwayuru ‘Nihon(jin)’ o kataru/kataru ‘Askese’ to “A(anti)-Ethik’: kōshite sekai wa fukusū ni naru no da” [The ‘Askese’ and “A(anti)-Ethik’ that Narrates/Betrays the so-called Japan(ese): Thus the World Becomes Multiple] in *Maruyama Masao o yomu* (Tokyo: Jōkyō Shuppan, 1997), 205.

“descent,” but rather as an affective fall or affirmative downward force: for Tanigawa it is precisely that “the fall (*la chute*) is active, but it is not necessarily a descent in space, in extension. It is the descent as the passage of sensation, as the difference in level contained in the sensation. [...] Sensation is inseparable from the fall that constitutes its most inward movement or ‘clinamen’. [...] The fall is what is most alive in the sensation, that through which the sensation is experienced as living. The fall is precisely the active rhythm.”¹⁶ But what is the specific politicality of this movement, the political position which the poet can possibly take in light of this downward movement, this repeating circuit of the origin?

In another decisive essay, “Shi to seiji no kankei,” Tanigawa issues a series of self-situating statements, addresses to critics, and enunciations of the relation between poets and the movement:

The present political way of thinking in relation to peace is for the time being to demand the renunciation of war, and while this is of course important, the poetic way of thinking ought to be a bit different. Reality (*Genjitsusei/riariti to iu mono*) has been split in two since the moment that politics invented methods of employing the raw violence (*nama na bōryoku*) of control indirectly and coldly. Both the methods of politics and the methods of poetry came into confrontation with each other through the form of a certain realism. Those who don't know the depth of this fault-line (*kono dansō no fukasa*) find it easy to write directly 'political poetry' (*'seiji-shi'*), advocate socialist realism, and so on, and thus the situation becomes even more confused. [...] The relation between the aspect of politics, which tends to forget its fundamental goals and easily becomes ossified by transitional demands, and the aspect of poetry, which, although strongly holding onto its fundamental intentions, easily forgets a clear sense of purpose, is sustained because these two aspects constantly attempt to overcome each other - I think that a new point of departure for poetry must be one which truly grasps this contradiction. This is precisely the reason I consider myself a member of an anti-political political fraction (*han-seijiteki na seijiha*).¹⁷

¹⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: Logique de la sensation* (Paris: Seuil, 2002), 54-55; *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (London: Continuum, 2003), 81-82.

¹⁷ Tanigawa, “Shi to seiji no kankei” [The Relation of Poetry and Politics] originally published in *Kōza gendai shi* I (Iizuka Shoten, November 1956), *TGS* I: 84.

What is at stake for Tanigawa is the articulation of what the politics of poetry, the politicality of poetry would look like as a form of engagement. That is, what could such a politicality of poetry do if it were inserted into the *political* conjuncture as opposed to the *poetic* one? But this again is too mechanistic; for Tanigawa it is the mutual encroachment of the political and the poetic which produces an impasse, not merely an impasse in political imagination, nor merely an impasse in the aesthetic, it produces an impasse in the possibility of holding oneself in the instability of the circular oscillation of the origin, the “world overflowing with light” and in an ethics of immanence. This “new departure” for poetry is thus contained not in bridging this chasm, but in entering into the “fault line” or “dislocation” (*dansō*) itself, pushing downwards towards the undefined, toward the energy which is both immanent to and estranged from the “I.”

Tanigawa reemphasizes the directly political problem posed by this self-recursivity when he puts forward the injunction that “the poet can only participate in the movement for world liberation by means of the total effort to liberate oneself. This might seem obvious, but politically it's not; it's not at all rare for a bourgeois to participate in the national liberation movement, or for a landlord to advocate freedom and popular rights (*jiyū minken*), but Miyazawa Kenji's thesis was that the poet will be unhappy until the entire world is liberated. If we reverse this (*ura o kaeseba*), it's rather that the poet can never determine him/herself to be already liberated. Someone who positions themselves such that their self-salvation is already complete (*jiko kyūsai ga kanryo shita to iu kanten ni tatsu mono*) can never be called a poet in any sense of the word.”¹⁸ That is, the poet is the one who, by inscribing the energy of the origin in the *socius* must always be alert to a blind complicity with the poetic product, the poetic after-effect. To produce the poem and

¹⁸ Tanigawa, “Shi to seiji no kankei,” *TGS* I: 86.

then position oneself comfortably for it to return to its putative origin and confirm its coordinates in the form of the identity of its creator is the hallmark of the identitarian aesthetic, the form of fascism in its “furthest conceptual extension.”¹⁹ On the contrary, the inability to de-work the product already circulating in the loop of the origin nevertheless points to a possibility, a possibility in impossibility: the de-working of the “I” as fictive origin, towards a diffuse singularity to which the poet, as an impossible partially-determinate entity strives. It is in this sense, the constant revolutionizing of the conditions of production, engagement, and articulation, such that the positions (object of application and object to which it is applied) of the traditional politics are dispersed in an immanent flux, ceasing to be “points” and becoming “lines” towards an anti-memory.²⁰

Thus the essential element for the non-political politics of the poetic sensibility is to deepen, to “go down” towards the roots, not in order to “return,” but in order to find the already-existing flows that enable resistance. Indeed, “If the everydayness (*nichijōsei*) that is filled with the life-content of resistance is lost, it lapses into conceptualization (*gainenka ni ochiiri*), and if historicity is lost, it becomes a trivial modernism (*masshōteki modanizumu*). This is quite an obvious point, but it is a fact that Japanese poetry has largely stagnated into precisely this space between naturalism and modernism.” He argues that it is in fact the peasantry, or the image of the peasant, which is the basis of this naturalism-modernism problematic. “Politically speaking, naturalist agrarianism (*shizenshugiteki nōminshugi*) emerged in the form of anarcho-syndicalism. It is to the merit of Hanada Kiyoteru that he considered the role of this anarcho-syndicalism to be a

¹⁹ Franco Berardi (Bifo), *Il sapiente, il mercante, il guerriero: Dal rifiuto del lavoro all’emergere del cognitario* (Rome: DeriveApprodi, 2004), 99-102.

²⁰ See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Mille plateaux* (Paris: Minuit, 1980), 284-380, esp. 356-367.

type of proto-communism, but he has not yet made any positive suggestions as to the decisive question: in what sort of economic formation (*uklad*)²¹ can we discover the depths (*shinbu*) of the people (*minshū*) who support the progressive aspects of this anarcho-syndicalism? On this question, I once pointed out that it could be found – in the solidarity of the East Asian village community (*tōyōteki na sonraku kyōdōtai no rentaisei*).²² Tanigawa’s characteristic tropes of depth, the diagonal connectivity of affect, and so forth appear here.

Sasaki-Uemura points out that “for Tanigawa, the village was not a feudal remnant to be overcome or an idealized place where communal harmony and consensus reigned; instead it was a site of profound conflict where the contradictions of modernity were visible most and acute.”²³ Clearly referencing the earlier Kōza faction discourse of the “feudal remnant” (*hōkenteki zanshi*), a term employed particularly in Hattori Shisō’s economic history of the late Tokugawa stage of “manufactures in the strict sense,”²⁴

²¹ I have here placed it in parentheses and Romanized it, but Tanigawa overcodes this phrase “*keizai seido*” with the *rubī* for the Japanese transliteration of the Russian term “*uklad*,” what might be translated as “social structure” or “way of life.” Historically in Marxist theory (specifically in the early debates on Soviet agrarian reform) it was used, particularly by Lenin, to connote something close to “mode of production” or “social formation” understood in a broad, commonsensical manner and does not necessarily mean something “economic” in the Marxist sense. We might most effectively think of an *uklad* in the sense of Tanigawa here, as the “solidarity of the East Asian village community.” See J. Keep, “The Agrarian Revolution of 1917-1918 in Soviet Historiography” in *Russian Review*, vol. 36, no. 4 (October 1977), 405-423, especially 420-421. Yamamoto Yoshihiko describes Yamada Moritarō’s search for the “Japanese form” of capitalist development in his famous *Nihon shihonshugi bunseki* [1934] as consistent with the general “*ukuraddo-ron*,” see his “*Nihon shihonshugi-shi no kenkyū: rekishi kara gendai e*” in *Shizuoka daigaku keizai kenkyū*, vol. 7, no. 3-4, especially 211. On this point and the concept of “*uklad*” see my discussion of Yamada’s work, particularly in chapters two and three.

²² Tanigawa, “*Shi to seiji no kankei*,” *TGS* I: 90-91. On this point and for a schematic overview of Tanigawa’s political thought, see Mizutamari Mayumi, “Tanigawa Gan no kyōdōtairon to saakuru kōsō,” *op. cit.*

²³ Wesley Sasaki-Uemura, “Tanigawa Gan’s Politics of the Margin in Kyushu and Nagano” in *positions: east asia cultures critique* vol. 7, no. 1 (Winter 1999), 134.

²⁴ See for instance, “*Ishinshi hōhōjō no shomondai*” in *Hattori Shisō zenshū*, vol. 4 (Fukumura Shuppan, 1973), and my discussion of this text in chapters 2 and 3.

Sasaki-Uemura quite correctly points out that Tanigawa neither refused the village community as backward nor embraced it as holistic retreat. But Tanigawa's rhetoric, the formal undulations of his inscription of the origin is not directed towards the village itself, but rather to its "solidarity" (*rentaisei*).

While Sasaki-Uemura has situated and described Tanigawa's "actual" historical engagement effectively and sympathetically, his argument tends to bypass its written conditions, the "properly" poetic non-political politics that underpin Tanigawa's rhetorical engagement. This difference between the "village" and the "solidarity" of the village is an essential example: Tanigawa is not so much interested in points as in lines. What is critical here is not the "people" or "masses," but their "depths" (*shinbu*); what is critical is not the "village" but the lines of solidarity that traverse it, the transversal intersections of sociality which penetrate the site, the lines of energy in the forms of life which appear there. As Satō Izumi argues, in Tanigawa this energy has a certain plasticity, it is prior to "shape," "direction," and so forth, and thus intersects closely with Tanigawa's image of the double: it could develop in innumerable directions, towards any political position, towards uncountable possibilities, and is therefore something beyond "measure."²⁵ Thus, when Tanigawa tells us that it is in this "solidarity" that the "depths" of the people can be found, he is reminding us that the source of energy, the "origin," is a constantly recurring movement which is itself fundamentally a practice, an ethics. It is never a given, it does not take the form of a substance which waits to be discovered, or a holism in which to find a self-confirming comfort; rather it is embodied in the social-historical life practices, the "everydayness" of an ethics of the encounter with the other, the making of significations for life in tandem with this other.

²⁵ Satō, "Kyōdōtai no saisōzō: Tanigawa Gan no 'mura'," 39-42.

But the thematic of the village, what could be found running through the village, is a constant figure of Tanigawa's writing. It is the historical form of what he refers to as the "homeland" (*furusato*): "I had no option but to return. I had to return, to this homeland where there was no one to welcome me back."²⁶ The homeland for Tanigawa is not a simplistic nationalist fantasy of a welcoming and self-generating organic whole, to which individuals belong as parts. Rather, the homeland is precisely the opposite: it is the site of the recursion of the origin itself, the place where this desire for return folds back onto itself as it discovers mid-flight that the place to which it wants to return is never self-identical. In this sense, the homeland is exactly its own lack, its own absence. That is, Tanigawa's entry into the question of the homeland, the home, the native place, takes the form of a specifically poetic entry. It enters into the *discourse* of the homeland, the tropes of the home: the near, the familiar, the familial, the linear, the expected. But it inverts this discourse by entering the term "homeland" into another code, the logic of the origin that can never be reached. The "homeland" thus becomes an index of its estrangement from itself, showing us that "the poet must enter into historical and poetic dialogue with that poetizing (*Dichtung*) which, in its way, already poetized a becoming homely (*heimisch*) in being unhomely (*unheimisch*)."²⁷

But Tanigawa expands the poetics of this simultaneous proximity and distance in a dramatic and decisive way: what, in fact, is this homeland which is unfamiliar, this homeland which does not welcome, but is instead a spacing of estrangement? Thus he

²⁶ Tanigawa, "Nōson to shi," [The Peasant Village and the Poem] 94. Matsumoto Kenichi also draws attention to this thought of the homeland to which a simple return is impossible: see his *Tanigawa Gan, kakumei densetsu: ichido kiri no yume* (Kawade Shobō, 1997), esp. 190-196.

²⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn: "Der Ister"* in *Gesamtausgabe*, bd. 53 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1984), 172; *Holderlin's Hymn "The Ister"*, trans. William McNeill and Julia Davis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 138.

asks:

What is the homeland? Ours is the first generation in which a large number of Japanese have emerged who were born in Manchukuo or raised in Korea – I think of the fact that for these people, the term “homeland” registers a blank stare (*furusato to iu kotoba ni kyoton toshita hyōjō wo ukaberu koto*). It is disquieting to think that this lack of a homeland isn’t even a problem for them, the sons of the colonial rulers. This is connected to the fundamental ideology of their fathers, to their ‘Manchukuo of the spirit’ (‘*seishin no Manshūkoku*). The homeland is a territorial site (*chiten*) from which one can see the history of one’s own existence as a differential equation of fate (*inga no bibun hōteishiki*) across the generations. Thus, in order to change the world, the homeland – the ancient and distant principle of causality for the construction of the self and the fulcrum for the lever which operates it (*jibun o kōsei suru furuku tōi ingaritsu to sore o ugokasu tame no teko no shiten*) – is essential.²⁸

Here the homeland is understood by means of the mechanism of the colony. Tanigawa sets up an opposition here between the need for a homeland as the primary mechanism for the construction of the self and the generation raised with a lack of a homeland. But simply by placing these operations together, by joining them in his writing, we can see another sequence of problems: the colonality of the nation-state itself, the colonial nature of its formation, and the colonized positionality productive of the “solidarity” of the “East Asian village.” For Tanigawa, the homeland is here placed in opposition to the imperial drive – those “sons of the colonial rulers” who “lack” a homeland retain the imperial movement of the uprooting of the earth, the formation of the new imperium in which “homeland” ceases to be integral. His rhetorical naïveté is co-extensive with a series of other readings: by considering the homeland to be a “principle of causality” (*ingaritsu*) for the construction of the self, as well as the “fulcrum for the lever which operates it (*sore o ugokasu tame no teko no shiten*),” Tanigawa points to the unavoidable complicity contained within the homeland as “origin,” the fact that it is both the point of

²⁸ Tanigawa, “Nōson to shi,” originally published in *Kōza gendai shi* III (Iizuka Shoten, January 1957), *TGS* I: 94.

commencement, and the device according to which it is made into a commencement. Further, by maintaining the linkage between the imperial moment and the maintenance of the nation-state, Tanigawa points to the very real series of contiguities and mutual imbrications between the colonial laboratory (the empire-colony dyad), and the full-blown operation of coloniality (the postcolonial condition of the nation-state).

Nevertheless, Tanigawa's endorsement of a certain rhetoric of integralism or national communion is disconcerting. But what is it that drives this problem of the homeland, why is it necessary? He warns us: "I am neither a historian nor a sociologist, but I insist on the fact that in the zone of sensation (*kansei no ryōiki*), the fragments and memories of the community (*kyōdōtai no hahen to kioku*) live on even today within the peasants, and within the majority of workers. I insist that they live on in the lowest class stratum of Japanese civilization (*Nihon bunmei no ichiban shita no kaidan*). And I insist that destroying these is neither a 'truly anti-feudal' struggle nor anything else (*shin no han-hōken tōsō demo nan demo nakute*); rather we must reawaken these fragments and memories and make them the basis for a new community. I insist that there is a certain point which tells us that without taking up this standpoint (*kenchi*), to live in the rural village, to write poetry in the rural village (*nōson de seikatsu shi, nōson de shi o kaku koto*) is meaningless."²⁹ The dominant developmentalist logic of the JCP, for whom the traces of the pre-war Popular Front (taking the form in Japan of an "all-out popular democratic anti-feudal struggle") remained decisive, has no interest in the "zone of sensation" (*kansei no ryōiki*), or the affective possibilities already in the conjuncture. These are merely the remnants of "feudal ideology," which for the Kōza faction, must be crushed in order to allow Japanese capitalism to develop "regular" and "normal" features,

²⁹ Tanigawa, "Nōson to shi," *TGS* I: 103.

a situation that will be ripe for socialist revolution; for the Rōnō opposition, these “remnants” are equally meaningless because they are already disintegrating under the growing concentration and scale of industry. Needless to say, neither the chauvinistic high Stalinism of the former, nor the mechanistic Second International messianism of the latter have anything to offer but an incapability of grasping the situation at its roots. To “reawaken” the “memories and fragments,” the lines of sensation and material-historical legacy sedimented in the life-practices of the village would be something else: an immanent revolution, one which strives for the revolutionizing of the practice of life. This crucial statement can also allow us to see the ambiguity and potentiality at work in Tanigawa’s rhetoric of the earth, the ground, the “territorial site” (*chiten* 地点) – after all, he calls this his standpoint (見地) – the decisional space which gives rise to the drive to “live” in the village, “to write poetry” in the village. That is, it returns us to the earlier question of the homeland. Here, however, the earth or ground of this new politics, this new poetry is one that is formed in practice, precisely *by* living in the village, by writing poetry in the village. In this sense, it does not stem from the desire to discover a more pure, untamed, holistic world. Rather, it shows that by inscribing new lines of sociality into the flux of existing ones, by living together and through the poetic practice, the territory or ground is formed and returned to, created in order that it can be a starting point, a departure, but never a simple end or telos.

Sasaki-Uemura points out that Tanigawa’s “nativism and antimodernism ought to be distinguished from a nostalgic desire for return to some mythic communal harmony of the past. For him, the village is the site of struggle because of its heterogeneous

composition.”³⁰ While he identifies exactly the political reasoning for Tanigawa’s ambiguous logic of the village, it is not simply that the village, the village which would be a site of “roots,” the “origin” and its “primal energy” itself *already* exists as such, as a “heterogeneous composition.” It is rather that the village comes to be composed poetically, it comes to be formed as an “origin,” through the compositional process of forming lines of solidarity, in other words, Tanigawa’s theory of the rural village “refers to an orientation rather than a belonging.”³¹ This orientation means that while the origin, the homeland is not merely an “idea,” it is an affective circuit, a space of figuration which the non-political politics of the poetic attempts to connect to, a force of “energy” in the form of raw potential in immanence.

Let us cite at length Tanigawa’s only completely programmatic political statement, one of the only times he comes close to an attempt at systematization, or a “framework.” But as we will see, its simplicity is deceptive:

- a) The vast majority of the Japanese masses (*minshū*) are of peasant origin. It is therefore the affective sensibilities of the peasantry that have been concealed by Japanese civilization. We can emphasize that the peasantry is in the position of mother (*hahaoya toshite no chi'i*) in relation to all laboring classes, beginning with the working class.
- b) The affective sensibilities of the peasantry are based on production connected to the earth (*tochi ni musubi tsuita seisan*). The earth is the source of all human affect: humans must become a mirror (*kagami*) of the earth.
- c) Progress must have a foundation in a territorial base (*dodai to narubeki konkyochi*). The workers and the pre-proletariat, the city and the countryside, the world and the homeland must be firmly unified.
- d) Yet in Japanese civilization, including that of the working class, a demand for self-alienation from this pre-proletariat, the countryside, and the homeland strongly functions.
- e) Because the path for the bottom-up (*ue-muki*) development of the Japanese peasantry and establishment of the individual was closed, the individual was

³⁰ Sasaki-Uemura, “Tanigawa Gan’s Politics of the Margin,” 136.

³¹ Jean-Luc Nancy, “Uncanny Landscape” in *The Ground of the Image*, trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 53.

established on a subjective basis, giving rise to a 180 degree optical illusion in relation to the tendency of objective proletarianization.

f) Japanese modernism does not hope to rescue an already-existent crisis of modernity, but rather aspires to place a modernity not yet existent in a complete form (*kanzen na katachi de wa mada sonzai shinai kindai*) directly into the hands of the individual.

g) This is a blindness (*mōdō*), a clinging onto a newly imagined landscape in order to dispel the objective conditions of the peasants who were driven off the land, an inverted agrarianism (*tōsaku sareta nōminshugi*).

h) The status quo is that agrarianism has internally embraced this blindness, becoming a naturalism. In other words, on the level of art, the relation between naturalism and modernism is one that is simply two sides of the same coin (*ura-omote*).

i) The blindness of the pre-proletariat can only be overcome by the organizational capacity (*soshikisei*) of the proletariat. But in such a situation, it must become the successor to the developmental moment (*hatten-teki keiki*) of the pre-proletariat. This moment is a zone of sensation directly proportional to the depth of connection to the land.

j) The Japanese working class commits the mistake of emphasizing the unity of worker and peasant only from the ideal aspect (*rinen no men*). This is because modernist ideology exists within the working class.

k) Through the organizational force (*soshikiriyoku*) of the workers, we must reconstruct the senses of the national people (*kokumin*) based on the everyday affective sensibilities of the peasantry, and smash the distorted blindness of the peasantry that conceals the contemporary moment.³²

What Tanigawa intends here is to emphasize that “without clarifying the immanent pre-communism generated by the land of Japan itself, the movement of Japanese communism will not be able to move a single step forward.”³³ The problematic posed by Tanigawa’s writing is the ambiguous nature of these terms: the earth, “Japanese civilization,” the village, the “homeland,” the countryside, the “territorial base.” We can easily dismiss him, as a classical national-Romantic, retreating into the space of fantasy by overcoding it with the conflation of the archaic and the genuine.³⁴ But in my view, Tanigawa’s text

³² Tanigawa, “Nōson to shi,” *TGS* I: 97. Sasaki-Uemura also translated a small part of this same list of demands, but I have used my own translation here (see “Tanigawa Gan’s Politics of the Margins in Kyushu and Nagano,” 134).

³³ “Nōson to shi,” *TGS* I: 102.

³⁴ I do not want to dismiss such a critique of Tanigawa. Clearly this dimension is present in his work, and it is one that we should relentlessly expose to its own textual instability. In literary-

obeys a different theoretical physics than it first appears – it is not, for instance, necessarily a correlate to Fanon’s now-classical understanding that a “national consciousness, which is not nationalism, is the only thing that will give us an international dimension.”³⁵ Unquestionably, this problematic also inhabits Tanigawa’s text. But again, we can only impute to him a disastrous nativist nationalism so long as we ignore the poetic and poietic dimension, the dimension of writing itself to which Tanigawa attributed so much force. “Just as there is a history written in history and a history of existence, there is a poetry written in poetry and a poetry of existence (*Chōdo rekishi ni kakareta rekishi to jitsuzai no rekishi ga aru yō ni, shi ni mo kakareta shi to jitsuzai no shi ga arimasu*).”³⁶

This poetry that is inscribed already before the movement of the poem is an intervention in history: the poet is concerned with the operativity of memory, but also its deworking, the limit and furthest extension of the “memories and fragments” of the community as such. Thus, “the poet and the historian converge in this essential point to the extent that they both speak of an action that precedes them but that exists for

historical terms, we should note the uncanny fact that Tanigawa’s collection *Sentō e no shōtai* was published in 1961, precisely the year of Mishima Yukio’s *Yūkoku* and Ōe Kenzaburō’s *Sevuntin*. On this point, see Isoda Kōichi’s “Sonraku no paradokkusu: Tanigawa Gan ni okeru jibatsu no kansei” [The Paradox of the Village: The Sensation of Self-Punishment in Tanigawa Gan] in *Gendaishi techō* 19-8 (July 1976), 104-107. In the present chapter, however, I want to try to read Tanigawa’s work not so much for its literary history, but rather in a decompositional or catachrestic manner in order to “force” it to disclose another writing, another reading.

³⁵ Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove, 1963), 247. I would note that contrary to a certain contemporary nationalist presentation of Fanon, it is crucial to emphasize that he did not in any way consider this “internationalism as collection of nationalisms” to be anything more than a transitional demand for a full decolonial thought to come, as an excessive “strategizing” to break the structure of coerced dependency. Fanon clearly takes the ideology of stable “national” or “civilizational” belonging as itself part of the double-bind of the state racism conditioning the modern world. Therefore, we should not impute to Fanon a simplistic equation between nationalism and resistance, a strategy that he critically explodes in *Black Skin, White Masks*.

³⁶ Tanigawa, “Tōyō no mura no iriguchi de,” [At the Entrance to the East Asian Village] *TGS* I: 252.

consciousness only because of their intervention.”³⁷ It is precisely this “texting” or “sentence-ing” that Tanigawa opens in the field of the historical: he undercuts at all times the simplistic political reading of his work by insisting on this “textuality” of circumstance, the text of poetry, the text of history, the text of politics, the text of “the people,” the text of the “land,” and so forth. The text’s complete binding, its “sheathed” and complete closure between two covers, is not being “put to work” here. We should pay close attention to the fact that Tanigawa insists not on the village as a putative unity, the imagined “origin” as a simple and obvious territorial site – he reminds us exactly that what is at stake is the practice, the “archi-ethical” practice of “writing poetry in the village” (*nōson de shi o kaku koto*), that the intervention of inscription always enters the interval of the semblance of substantiality, is always undercutting it from the inside. This is why we must “always set out from texts [...], texts in the ordinary and traditional sense of written letters, or even of literature, or texts in the sense of differential traces. And we are unable to do otherwise than *take our departure in texts insofar as they depart* (they separate from themselves and their origin, from us) *at the departure* [*partir des textes, et des textes en tant qu'ils partent* (qu'ils se séparent d'eux-mêmes et de leur origine, de nous) *dès le départ*].”³⁸ It is precisely this capacity or dynamics already contained within the line of writing that allows the poem to “intervene” to an extent, to act as a kind of *clinamen*, to swerve through the situation, wherein its inherent instability, or its own internal tendency towards erasure, comes to the surface as an active force, one that allows the poem to be “configured as the testimonial [*témoignage*] that it is,” in Lacoue-

³⁷ Paul de Man, “Wordsworth and Hölderlin” in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 64-65.

³⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Donner le temps: la fausse monnaie* (Paris: Galilée, 1991), 130-131; *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 100.

Labarthe's terms. If the poem is itself already a "testament" or "witness," then its capacity to observe, to speak truth, to testify to its own conditions of possibility, is already inscribed in its contours and traces. Therefore, why "configure" it?

Here the poem is in some sense a "retrojected" trace whose existence is already "under erasure," under the condition of its own inscription. But the poem is also that unstable zone of practice, the line of *poiesis*, of making-doing. This doubling, however, is not what renders the poem mute, or an antinomy that disables the poem's function. In fact, it is the opposite. The dynamism of the poem, its status as a *diagram* of relationality itself, stems from this tension, this taut bi-directionality that "discovers" its own instrumental possibilities precisely in being "thrown back" on its own non-instrumentality. That is, the poet's act of inscription, in which the written line traces out its objects, does not rely on the structure of referentiality as such, or even the economy of the sign. It is already in a logical circuit, one in which its set of referents are deployed retrospectively *after* their own traces. If the poem is the form of the trace itself, what the poem testifies to is this paradoxical emptiness: that the poem's "material" referent is nothing other than the materiality that emerges in the "spacing" (*espacement*)³⁹ between the poem and itself. This is why the poem can never be a "means" – it already exists in a relation of referentiality that is prior to the relation of "means" and "telos." Because the poem's role of "testimony" or "witness" is never the naïve one in which it "records" something substantial in history and "recalls" it – because this erases precisely the

³⁹ On the question of "spacing" (*espacement*), which is never the simple logic of the social space between the self and other as apparently "stable" subjects, but is always something interior to the subject's own inherent incompleteness, see Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Minuit, 1967), 99-108 and "Signature Event Context" in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), esp. 317-318; see also Naoki Sakai's crucial extension of this point in *Voices of the Past: The Status of Language in Eighteenth-Century Japanese Discourse* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), 106-108.

historicity of the poetic line or inscription itself – we should give an entirely different sense to this “witnessing.” Rather, the poem itself as a form re-cords or re-accords and recodes the entire logic of observation, disrupting the possibility of being “a means” by concentrating in its aspects of figuration, con-figuration, or shaping, the “making” of elements into a sensation or effect.

The poem must be con-figured, that is given “figure” or “shape,” in order for its “spacing” (we should also read this as line-spacing, spacing of the ideogram, but also the philosopheme, the “spacing” of concepts or the “holding together” of historical events, the “bundle”) to “take hold” (*prise*), because the form of the poem is a “record” of the “taking hold” of contingency, when it bursts into form as a consistency. But this consistency is not “static,” it is rather a type of “holding forth” or “standing reserve” that creates a counterposition (*Gegenstand*) within it, a foothold (*ashiba*) for the “foot” that traces the boundary, that “traces the earth underfoot” (*ashimoto no daichi o kaku*). It is on this point of “configuration” that we should take seriously that the fundamental politicality of Tanigawa’s work lies in this complex sequence of signification – the earth (*daichi*), the territorial point (*chiten*), the “coordinates” (*zahyō*) of the poet or “configurer,” but also the point of writing, the “*point*” or “period” in the sentence. Let us cite briefly one key poetic moment in his work:

かれの座標は名もしらぬ村界にあつて
倫理の異様な深さのなかを
あたらしい罪が魚眼でみまわした
さまざまのはげしい形がめざめようとする
それよりもわずかな昔であった

His coordinates are in the nameless world of the village
In the midst of the uncanny depths of ethicality
A new sin glances around through a fish’s eyes
A multiplicity of violent forms strain to emerge
It was a more distant past.

かれが人間 A であるならば B あるいは
C としての人間も見なければならなかった
If he was human A another human
As B or C also had to observe it⁴⁰

These “coordinates” (*zahyō*), perhaps another term for this uncanny “origin,”⁴¹ are located not in the substantial or “actual” village, but in this “world” or “milieu” whose proper name cannot be known. Therefore, this “ethicality” that is implied by the “coordinates” is always located in a certain “uncanniness,” in the “depths” (and we should note the constancy and rigor of this term *shinbu* or *fukasa* in Tanigawa) of “solidarity” or in the absolute materiality of sociality. The ethical field is neither whole nor stable here, it is not a simple “commitment” to the village – after all a “new sin” (*atarashii tsumi*) is observing, “scanning” or “checking out” the interior of this ethics, where the “original sin is at work everywhere (*die Erbsünde wirkt überall*).”⁴² This “sin” or a certain “self-punishment” (*jibatsu*)⁴³ is always boring a hole, forcing open an aperture inside this “ethicality,” this “stance” or “standpoint” of the observer (*kenchi*), that unsettles it and prevents this “ethics” from being a wholly present “viewpoint” or “worldview.” Here Tanigawa emphasizes the “violent,” “volatile,” “furious” forms or

⁴⁰ Tanigawa, “Ningen A,” [Human A] originally published in *Daichi no shōnin* [The Merchant of the Earth] (Boinsha, 1954), *TGS* I: 27.

⁴¹ See Shibusawa Takasuke, “Usuakari no rikigaku” [The Physics of Twilight] in *Gendaishi techō* 19-8 (July 1976), 48-55.

⁴² Marx, *Das Kapital*, Erster Band in *Marx-Engels Werke* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1962), bd. 23, 620; *Capital*, vol. 1 in *Collected Works of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels* (New York: International Publishers, 1996), vol. 35, 589. We should note that here Marx is referring specifically to the “original sin” (*Erbsünde*) of the “so-called primitive accumulation,” the abyssal origin of capital, but also the segmentation of pure heterogeneity into the form of specific difference, the “*differentia specifica*” that is the “retrojected” systematic expression of the social field implied by the possibility of the buying and selling of this absent “metaphor” called labor power. On this point see Gavin Walker, “Primitive Accumulation and the Formation of Difference: On Marx and Schmitt” in *Rethinking Marxism* 23-3 (London: Taylor & Francis, 2011), X-X.

⁴³ See Isoda, “Sonraku no paradokkusu: Tanigawa Gan ni okeru jibatsu no kansei,” op. cit.

shapes that emerge from this clash or this mutual opening, the bubbling up within or mutual penetration of these openings onto the other space: they are attempting or straining to “emerge.” These “forms” or “shapes” (*katachi*) will be taken up by Tanigawa in the analytic of the “archetype” or “typical pattern” (*tenkei*), a point I take up shortly.

What undercuts or destabilizes this situation of the ethical opening within the poet’s coordinates is the strange temporality employed by Tanigawa here: this circuit of “his” coordinates, and the forms that emerge within them is suddenly dislocated: all of this “will have taken place,” because it is a pattern that emerges in an earlier moment (*sore yori mo wazuka na mukashi de atta*). This “retrojection,” a kind of projection that retrospectively testifies to “what comes before,” should remind us of the point of writing, the imperfect cyclical or circular return of the origin in Tanigawa:

存在ははな欠け 現象はゆるみ
もはや祖国に正しい円のひとつもなく
Being is effaced phenomena are loose
No longer a single perfect circle in the motherland⁴⁴

That is, this process of the becoming of the ethical is thrown back in time, but only to ground a future projection, a future anterior in the strict sense. And here, Tanigawa brings in something that perfectly illustrates this problem of the absence of a “perfect,” “correct,” or “pure” circle: the problem of the origin returns in the impossibility of the simple presence of “human A.” That is, insofar as there is already one human A, humans B or C must be posited: human A cannot emerge ex nihilo.

Yet, this problem of the origin or even the “original sin” shows us this gap or rupture of social “spacing” – it is not just that the positing of human A requires human B or C; as we have seen, human A is *already* split in him or herself. That is, the “violent

⁴⁴ Tanigawa, *Ningen A* in *TGS* I: 26.

forms” are straining to emerge from this ethicality that comes from elsewhere, into which the “new sin” enters and bores a hole. The paradox that Tanigawa is pointing to here is that “human A” is not the *subject* of this process, the subject is this “coordinate,” something that exceeds or intervenes before “human A” can be captured as a subject. Therefore, Tanigawa exposes us carefully to a subtle and immanent critique of sociality itself, an attempt to talk about this unspeakable sociality that could exist, either before or beyond the capture into the modern world order.

He is always trying to maintain this ruptured cyclical movement of the dialectic, but is careful not to call it a “pure circle” – instead it is a “spiral” (*rasen*) that oscillates, spinning first centrifugally outwards, and then centripetally inwards: “The two major courses of the spiral movement of the dialectic (*benshōhō no rasen undō*): the logic of ‘over-coming’ or ‘sur-mounting’ (*norikoe*) towards the outside, and the logic of ‘slipping into’, ‘in-sinuation’, or ‘burrowing into’ (*mogurikomu*) the inside.”⁴⁵ We should note the sexuality⁴⁶ of this economy of movement: the torsional exchange between the “mounting” of the exterior and the “penetration” of the interior, that is, the phallic expropriation of externality and “invagination” of interiority, hence Tanigawa’s emphasis on “birth,” “fertility,” “pregnancy,” “insemination,” “nativity,” and so forth, a sequence that is always concerned with this untraceable “origin” (*genten*), one that must be acting but that cannot be present as a circle. Tanigawa therefore alerts us in his written act to the

⁴⁵ Tanigawa, “Shōmin: Yoshimoto Taka’aki” [The People: Yoshimoto Taka’aki] in *TGS I*: 163.

⁴⁶ Of course, we should therefore also be aware and careful of the dangers contained in his constant flirtation with “lineage,” “heritage,” “parentage,” “breed,” “genealogy,” and so forth, for the proximity of this sequence to its possibility of subsumption under the “national” or “racial” subject as “species.” On this sequence of insemination/invagination in the formation of the nation-state as a schema, see Yutaka Nagahara, “The Corporeal Principles of the National Polity: The Rhetoric of the Body of the Nation, or the State as Memory-Apparatus,” trans. Gavin Walker in *Perversion and Modern Japan*, eds. Nina Cornyetz and J. Keith Vincent (London: Routledge, 2010), 61-102.

subject as something irreparably conditioned by its own positing, and therefore precisely something that, as Uno Kōzō always described the form of capitalism itself, is always in an infinite regress, something “eternally developing in the form of a spiral (*eikyūteki ni, rasenjō o nashite hatten suru mono*).”⁴⁷

It is here that the “operative” or “configurer” finds a foothold, “marks the earth underfoot,” and holds him or herself immanent to this spiraling motion: “We might say the work (*shigoto*) of this operative is to concentrate to the utmost on the inscription of this ‘dialectical spiral’ into the midst of the hegemony of the ‘physics of twilight’, to leave behind a foundation (*dodai*) as if it were a visible form (*me ni mieru katachi*) of the tower of Babel.”⁴⁸ Here, therefore, we can see that this operative or configurer is not one who can “break” or eliminate this cycle: rather, this figure con-figures a “foundation” (*dodai*), a visible “monument” that “testifies” to the heterogeneity of the land, the written line of the poem itself as the tower of Babel. Thus, this configuration of the poem is before all else an act of disclosure, one that attempts to present the poem’s already-existing capacity to “ground” or “found” something “in a visible form.”

In a well-known and widely read dialogue exemplary of the postwar intellectual situation, Maruyama Masao remarks about Tanigawa and Yoshimoto Taka’aki, that “the motor-force of nativism is the question of subjectivity.” Unquestionably this is the case for Yoshimoto. But Tanigawa’s “nativism” (*dochakushugi*), if it can even be described in this way, bears little resemblance to Maruyama’s discussion of the “emphasis on internal spontaneity (*naihatsusei*) in contrast to both the foreign and the given.”⁴⁹ Tanigawa

⁴⁷ Uno Kōzō and Umemoto Katsumi, *Shakai kagaku to benshōhō* [Social Science and the Dialectic, 1976] (Tokyo: Kobushi Shobō, 2006), 37.

⁴⁸ Shibusawa, “Usuakari no rikigaku,” 55.

⁴⁹ Maruyama Masao, Satō Noboru, and Umemoto Katsumi, *Sengo Nihon no kakushin shisō*

distinguished the problems that concerned him from Yoshimoto's political logic by returning to the problem of the origin:

We are internally split. The extension of this branch is the split between the Japanese vanguard and the Japanese masses. This is not the split between characteristics dealt with in the one-way transmission from high to low, as in logic and emotion, conscious and sub-conscious. There is a correlative relationship of proportionality here: high consciousness is often light, low consciousness is often heavy. This is not something that can be unilaterally determined, like Yoshimoto's argument that first the masses (*shomin*) become the people (*jinmin*), and then the people become the vanguard, as if it resembled the logic of an insect's change of form. At its root, this is part and parcel of the ideology of contempt for the human. If we are operatives (*kōsakusha*) who carry a plus sign (正の記号), operatives who carry a minus sign (負の記号) are already in the base of the silent masses (*chinmoku shite iru taishū no teibu*). We agonize over our own attempts to separate ourselves from private property, but in contrast to those who always attempt to monopolize everything, there will still be someone, somewhere, who is absolutely excluded from ownership in the form of private property. I refer to this as the 'origin' (*genten*), but isn't it in fact the operative who constructs the circuit (*kairo o kensetsu suru*) for the unification of the vanguard and the origin?⁵⁰

In other words, the operative or configurer (*kōsakusha*) – a term we can consider appropriate too for the figure of the poet – is the one who “operationalizes” the origin by inscribing it in the *socius*.⁵¹ In other words, this figure is not simply an activist or “organizer.” Rather, “*kōsakusha*” is a naming strategy taken by Tanigawa to indicate this intimate cross-over of the poet/historian of the present, who treats the configuration of the poem in its essential and irredeemable sociality and not simply as a “means” of “description” or “declaration.” That is, the problem of the *poematic* is a question of

[Radical Thought in Postwar Japan] [1966, original title *Gendai Nihon no kakushin shisō*] (Gendai no Rironsha, 1983), 97.

⁵⁰ Tanigawa, “Gendai shi no rekishiteki jikaku: Sengo ishiki no kanketsu o megutte,” [The Historical Self-Awareness of Contemporary Poetry: On the End of Postwar Consciousness] originally published in *Shin Nihon bungaku* (July 1958), *TGS* I: 126.

⁵¹ For a different reading of the term *kōsakusha*, see Iwasaki Minoru's “Tanigawa Gan to sengo seishin no senseiryoku,” [Tanigawa Gan and the Potentiality of the Postwar Spirit] foreword to *Tanigawa Gan serekushon*, vol. 1, eds. Iwasaki Minoru and Yonetani Masafumi (Nihon Keizai Hyōronsha, 2009), xi-xxxiv.

presentation of the structuring absence of a situation, and never the simple *representation* or inclusion of the situation's elements. In other words, the *kōsakusha* is one who intervenes in the situation in order to present that situation in a double movement of catachresis or decomposition and recomposition, in order to “force” an effect that both is and is not already there, to configure the effects of the poem in which its compositional elements loop back to the structure in order to concatenate themselves to it, and produce a “witnessing.”

We can call this figure therefore a “configurer,” the one who inserts and is inserted into the poem in order to concretize an effect. But this is not a position of exchange or management of the middle between two bounded positions that are already figured as a two. The configurer also relates to “what is already there” but only in the sense of “already” and not in the sense of “is” as if “what it is” were already determined. This is precisely the simultaneous bind and openness of the poetic moment. In fact, one of the essential problems with the reception of Tanigawa is that he has rarely been taken seriously when he remarked that politics do not equal poetry, that he belonged to the “non-political political faction,” and reminded us of the simplistic sense of “politicality” that stems from “directly political poetry.” Rather, most commentators both hostile and sympathetic seem to agree on a naïve equation of his “historical” political actions, statements, and experiences with his poetry, as if the objects, bodies, and languages that spin to the surface in his poetry existed in a simplistic referentiality to “actual” signifieds in the social-historical world. That is, there is a certain unspoken agreement that Tanigawa's vocabulary – village, solidarity, blood, soil, words, thought, Japan, etc – is also “our” vocabulary, in which these terms supposedly function in a “clear” or

“obvious” way. But this conflation would function as a kind of universal erasure or elimination of the aspect of *writing* itself, the aspect of inscription and improvisation. Therefore I attempt to practice a certain type of “catachresis” or “decomposition and recomposition” in his work in order to “force its secret,” to compel it to disclose its dynamics. It is truly only in relation to a lexicon that is estranged from us that we can understand Tanigawa’s language. His terms circulate in what he calls the “depths” (*shinbu*), a site that is prior (unspeakably prior) to whatever is being referenced (note: it is always “*X no shinbu*”) as if this X before the possessive simply signaled the absence of the signified or abyss of the sign itself. Therefore we do an incomparable violence to Tanigawa when we think of him as a poet of “the people” (*minshū*) rather than of “the depths of the people” (*minshū no shinbu*). There is a vast and aporetic gap between these two expressions. He does not indicate by “*minshū no shinbu*” the “substratum” or “ancient roots” of something called “the people” but rather *the total absence of referentiality* that this “people” exists in, a point that he calls “the origin.”

The origin is pure flux, pure potentiality or heterogeneity that is always anterior to its representation, an energy which cannot be directly connected to: it requires the circuit (the poem) to indirectly operate. In essence, this “origin” (*genten*) connotes above all else a certain ethicality of the encounter, the possibility in this encounter of something irreducible to the clash of subjects, a glimpse or fleeing instant of something beyond the “oversaturated or overdetermined” lattice-work of measure, something that is “in the final analysis without any terms of comparison,” an encounter in which it may be possible to conceive of an ethics, insofar as this encounter takes place to some extent between

“strangers.”⁵²

What is interesting here is Tanigawa’s description of the “origin” as the “someone, somewhere, who is absolutely excluded from ownership in the form of private property.” He has, of course described this multivalent terms before in numerous ways. But here the origin is understood as that someone, the “someone” left over when the relations change, the remnant, the excess, the traces of the former *uklad*, the one who does not, who cannot conform to the shift, whose energy or potentiality overflows the “cramped space” of the new relations. The origin is that something which still remains in excess after the movement of integration is complete, that remainder which cannot flow back to its point of departure, the “primal energy.” It is precisely in this sense that the poem (or the *poematic*) is a circuit, a territorial zone or site from which the origin can be approached, not in order to return, but in order to “mark the earth underfoot today.” It is a practical-poietic movement of creation which allows for the origin to be given, “a springing up or surging forth, the opening and presentation of a sense that refers to nothing but this presentation.”⁵³ But the doubts still remain as to Tanigawa’s origin, and the rhetorical sequence fraught with danger he diagonally inscribes it through: “Japanese civilization,” “the people,” the “village,” the “community,” their “energy.” Are these terms not densely sedimented with the residue of fascism? Aren’t these terms themselves the rhetorical limbs of the State drive as an apparatus, which ceaselessly deterritorialize and reterritorialize the unit of the One of the State onto the raw flux of singularities, remaking them as a unitary “people” and then ascribing to them the origin? Does Tanigawa not fall into precisely this trap of the circular logic of the State drive?

⁵² Sakai, *Voices of the Past*, op. cit, 110.

⁵³ Nancy, “Uncanny Landscape,” op. cit., 58.

But in order to dislocate this question, to return Tanigawa's vocabulary to a certain essential estrangement, we ought to pay close attention when he takes up the question of the "archetypal pattern" (*tenkei*), the "type" or "expected form." He argues: "Only when the situation is cut loose from and then reconnected to the archetypal pattern or type, then for the first time the situation confronts a previously unseen archetypal pattern. Smashing the theory of vulgar realism which says that the archetype is visible (*kashiteki*) is the only path towards rescuing the worker's creativity (*sōzōsei*) from the sterility (*fumō*) of today. The problem lies in whether or not we are ready to first wage war against the metaphysics harbored in the workers' own view of labor."⁵⁴ This "visibility" is a decisive turning point, an essential moment we must attend to closely. When the situation, in which the "pattern" or "type" that is made into the explanatory force of its own existence, is violently "cut loose" from this type, it does not simply return to a state of flux, a chaotic space of unmoored singularities. Such a pre-social space of the pure psychic monad cannot be willed into existence as long as the social-historical realm remains inescapable: this flux itself could only be a partially-determined flux within the social-historical. Thus upon the disconnection of the type from the situation, another "type" is discovered, one that was previously invisible. Here we see the immanence of Tanigawa's non-political politics of the poem: this second "type" is the new potential strand of energy, the "commons" or the results of recombination, a new form of sociality. Any new form of social life will need to confront the inability to dissolve the social, and therefore must reckon with it: the "type" itself cannot be frontally attacked and destroyed, as if the social-historical "I" could negate itself and yet somehow

⁵⁴ Tanigawa, "Teihen būmu to tenkei no fukashisei," [The Boom of Interest in the Lowest Stratum and the Invisibility of the Archetype] *TGS* I: 171-172.

remain “I.”

But the problem for Tanigawa, and the problem for us, remains the articulation of such a non-political politics of the poem in a situation in which, “to put it generally, where there is organization, there is no energy, and where there is energy there is no organization.”⁵⁵ The problem of “organization” (*soshiki*), a decisive trope of the early and nascent New Left in Japan, is that of the poetics of this politics, exactly as Tanigawa remarked above, it is the “organizer” (poet) who inscribes the circuit between the line of the movement and the point of the origin. But to emphasize this “organizer” or poet’s multidirectional positionality is not to produce a *renouveau* of “the Great Man,” the Creator of “the” movement endowed with rationality and therefore “action,” but rather to emphasize the combinatory possibilities of the poem, the act of inscription which grounds the ethics of the common. Thus Tanigawa reminds us that this “organizer” or poet is not necessarily who we think it is: “the contemporary moment is the era of the organizer (*soshikijin*), the era of the struggle between the non-organizationality (*hisoshikisei*) of the organizer and the organizationality of the non-organizer.”⁵⁶ This is the crucial point, that it is precisely the non-organizer whose organizational capacity can produce this articulation. Or perhaps it is the opposite, that it is the “non-organizationality” of the organizer or poet which can effect a circuit, a linkage between the recombined “type,” the new sociality and the “origin,” the flux of figuration which can allow the “primal energy” to flow into the situation. This is why he calls for us to “smash” the “vulgar realism” of the “visible type”: we can recognize immediately this “visibility” as the apparatus of

⁵⁵ Tanigawa, “Soshiki to enerugi,” [Organization and Energy] originally published in *Tōkyō daigaku shinbun*, reissue no. 17 (September 18, 1957), *TGS* I: 268.

⁵⁶ Tanigawa, “Soshiki to byōshiki,” [Organization and] originally published in *Tōkyō daigaku shinbun* (October 2, 1958), *TGS* I: 292.

capture itself, a historical form of normalization, making-commensurable, and making-explainable by “type,” a mechanism for “detecting irregularities” and erasing them, a regime of “faciality” (*visag  t  *). But as Tanigawa insists, as do Deleuze and Guattari, smashing this mechanism will nevertheless result in new “divergence-types” (*  carts-types*),⁵⁷ which were “previously unseen.”

The chaotic and unordered flux of elements prior to the origin of the modern order is overlaid with a grid, a finely calibrated lattice-work of computation whereby this flux will thereafter become specific difference – this grid-effect is exactly what Deleuze and Guattari call the “apparatus of capture.” Capture, or enclosure, is constituted by two operations: “direct comparison and monopolistic appropriation. And the comparison always presupposes the appropriation. ... The apparatus of capture constitutes a *general* space of comparison and a *mobile* center of appropriation,” “a white wall/black hole system” (*syst  me mur blanc – trou noir*) or regime of “faciality” (*visag  t  *).⁵⁸ That is, in this system of capture, all differences are placed onto a white wall, the expansive and broad social plane in which all differentiations are inscribed on the surface. It is a system which is organized to enclose the existing flux into a planar field of signification (the white wall, in which all differences are lined up) and sites of subjectivation (the black holes), wherein desire itself is put to work for its own ends. Thereafter, the elements that have been enclosed or captured will furnish the putatively “natural” grounding of the system’s capacity for thriving on its own apparent contradictions. What Deleuze and Guattari point out in this question of faciality is that the “archetype” or typological pattern, while a moment of appropriation, is also the formation of a pre-organized system

⁵⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille plateaux*, op. cit., 217.

⁵⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille plateaux*, op. cit., 555.

of positions, a creation of boundaries within which comparison will thereafter take place, strengthening the effect of capture every time it is undertaken. The existence of “type” itself means that there is no exclusion. In other words, enclosure or capture operates by forming a social field in which all these “divergence-types” are accounted for in its own range, in which all differences are placed onto the white wall, interspersed with black holes of passion. Thereafter, there is no such thing as the substantial “exterior,” the absolute exterior. Instead, there come to be “internal exteriors,” pockets of energy in the process of forming subjects which show that this white wall/black hole system is a vast expanse of gaps.

Thus Tanigawa tells us that this poetics of the non-political politics leads to a declaration: “The communitarian sensibilities of the Japanese masses (*Nihon minshū no kyōdōtaiteki kankaku*) have finally begun to move in the direction of a new light. The impact of this has clearly staggered the organizations for the reform of the establishment. It seems that we are now en route towards a revolution without a worldview (*sekaikan naki kakumei*).”⁵⁹ The primary ordering mechanism of the “reformist organizations” (JCP and the anti-JCP, who still remain tied by negation to the JCP discourse) is the “worldview.” It is the coordination of “the” revolutionary project which is their operational center, the collating of flows into units of time and space, to be made commensurable on a world-scale and thereby function as one unitary, seized and harnessed State body, the power of the “organized social forces”⁶⁰ once they have been taken over. But to make a revolution without a worldview: what would this consist in?

⁵⁹ Tanigawa, “Minshū no mutōhateki enerugi” [The Non-Partisan Energy of the People] originally published in *Nihon dokusho shinbun*, no. 918 (December 2, 1957), *TGS* I: 271.

⁶⁰ Marx, “Instructions for the Delegates of the Provisional General Council” in *MECW*, vol. 20 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1986), 190.

Why would Tanigawa reject the “worldview” as a standpoint for revolutionary practice? The “worldview” is the view from above, the view that seizes and harnesses the “organized social forces,” but this is not the perspective of the “origin” as a line for a new sociality, it is simply an inversion, a grand project for re-aligning the process of domination. It moves up, away from the earth, away from the roots, away from the “depths,” in order to “save” – to “destroy” and thereby “save.” But Tanigawa has already reminded us above: “in the zone of sensation (*kansei no ryōiki*), the fragments and memories of the community live on even today ... and I insist that destroying these is neither a ‘truly anti-feudal’ struggle nor anything else.”⁶¹ This is the decisive point, that community as a task, the possibility of a different order to our lives has nothing whatsoever to do with the logic of development, the fantasy of rational mastery. But neither is this a notion of a simple “return.” We should note that Tanigawa is careful to “locate” or “place” for us this problem: it is not located or sited in the nation, in the state, but “in the zone of sensation.” That is, already we have been positioned within a zone that is ontologically prior to the social field as a field of stable subjects, already we are in the space of commonality with the stranger, or the pure other, with whom we can share precisely “sensation” without entering the field of the “archetype.” Among other reasons, this is why we should be careful to not “contextualize” Tanigawa too easily. There is always something in writing which exceeds the polysemy of social life, an excess, a “spacing,” “graft,” “dissemination,” and so forth that renders the concept of context unstable in the written text. Context implies that the line of writing is already fully saturated, but if this is the case, the specifically written dimension of inscription is always re-routed to something that is already “counted” or merely represented, something stable

⁶¹ Tanigawa, “Nōson to shi,” *TGS* I: 103.

and discoverable: a unitary “language,” a “nation,” a “people,” an “identity.” But Tanigawa’s text is always shifting or placing a slippage into this neat equation, always producing mechanisms that protect this dissemination of the text that the notion of “natural” context is always working to suppress or elide.

Yet Tanigawa is aware of the ease with which he can be mistakenly read as a simply “pre-modern nationalist” (Yoshimoto’s epithet for him), but he consistently undercuts this reading: the origin “...at first glance appears truly natural, but it persistently evades disclosure of its essence and escapes in flight, and thus we must suppose it to be an energy that erupts by camouflaging itself and transforming into something self-directed. But since this thought disguises itself, it cannot guarantee the eternal continuance of this energy. Thus until this storm once again erupts, the leaves and stems will wither away, and only the roots will remain, but if we think of a strange plant which can flourish through its roots alone, which can flourish through its withered leaves, then we come close to the image I intend.”⁶² This is not simply a politics of resignation: what Tanigawa does not mention, but which is the crux, the “circuit” of the entire operation, is nothing less than the poem, the material writing of this unnatural “origin” which gives no comfort. It is the poem which creates the circuit according to which the recursivity of this energy can be tapped.

The courage of poetry: that it can be understood or emphasized in two different ways. Or perhaps it is concerned with a subjective genitive: courage here is the courage of poetry for itself, the courage of poetry for poetry (let us call it its tenacity [*obstination*]). In the discovery of the poematic or of the *dictamen*, we are dealing with something like the archi-ethics of poetizing as such: the poem is the archi-ethical act. [...] The courage of poetry means: courage to abandon the mythological, to break with it and deconstruct it. It is the courage to invent poetry,

⁶² Tanigawa, “Yūmin to zoku no aida,” [Between Idle and Tribal] originally published in *Shisō no kagaku* (December 1961), *TGS* II: 384.

to configure the Poem as the testimonial (*témoignage*) that it is.⁶³

In Tanigawa, this “courage” towards the archi-ethical inscription of the origin remains a decisive source. A certain commitment to the figuration itself, in other words a placing in relation of poetry to itself, an insistence that the condition of possibility of the poem is precisely the “archi-ethical” act of the figuration and flux inherent in the poem itself.

Thus, we see that Tanigawa’s work articulates an essential element of the linkage between politics and poetry, or the politics of the poem: that is, the figure of the “origin” which is not given, but produced by its own operations. This is the center of the “revolution without a worldview,” that is, a revolution which would have the courage to incessantly revolutionize itself by dispersing itself, by holding itself immanent to the flux it produces, and thereby finding its ground not merely in the absence of a ground, but in the constant creation of new grounds: the constant and endless act of “tracing the earth underfoot.” For the later historiographical and literary trends he inspired, Tanigawa’s work often functioned as a “re-enchantment” of “that which is Japanese” (*Nihonteki naru mono*). And his discourse plays with this boundary quite consciously. But this danger contains its own power, its own essential clues for us today: the “cramped space,” the intense “depths” of the density of “the people” or “*minshū*” that he calls into being as an abyssal origin remains powerful, precisely because of its proximity to capture; that is, it is not a site of “substantiality” but the site where the *fiction* or *semblance* (*Schein*) of “substantiality” is composed and deployed.⁶⁴ Tanigawa’s work can function, not as a

⁶³ Lacoue-Labarthe, “Le courage de la poésie,” op. cit, 151-152.

⁶⁴ On the question of Hegel’s term *Schein* (“semblance”), or its technical Japanese translation *kashō* (仮象), see in particular Uno Kōzō, “Rōdōryoku naru shōhin no tokushusei ni tsuite,” [On the Specificity of Labor Power as a Commodity] in *UKC*, vol. 3, 595. Tanigawa extensively utilized this term “*kashō*,” especially in his discussions of the figure of Christ – see “Shōmin: Yoshimoto Taka’aki” in *TGS* I: 64.

guide, but as a historical-material trace of the figuration of the origin, an anti-memory which still calls for new forms of recombination, new ways of relating in an immanent, poietic zone which cannot be re-discovered or returned to, but which must be created and inscribed anew.

In other words, Tanigawa's endorsement of the "lowest stratum" is not an endorsement and simple valorization of "the people" as a substantiality, but rather a poetic figuration of the traces of the operation of capture by which the flux of energy is harnessed into "a people." That is, we should treat Tanigawa's thought as before all else, an historical investigation, an attempt to write the poetics of history, the physics of power which undulates throughout the writing of history and the historicity proper to writing itself. Tanigawa thus con-figures ("operationalizes in tandem") the poem's own force of figuration. Through the exposure of this figurational space, which is the essence of historicity, we can see precisely what his poetics produce for us: that the people is never an object, but always and in the first instance, is a form of con-figuration, a captured flux which is always in the process of attempting to legitimate itself retrospectively.

"The people" itself is a poem, a "passional and living form." It is a creative and semiotic flux which the state deploys in order to "visualize" the image of its interior externality. We must have the courage to break and configure this poem divergently, configure it in such a way that it is not misused as a means, as a device for the retrospective stabilization of the "we" as a national subject. We instead need the courage to hold ourselves immanent to the configurational aspect of the poem that Tanigawa's text discloses and enacts, the improvisational and precarious hazard of the "we" so that it never becomes "the people," but rather holds open the possibility of community as a

project, not as an accomplished fact. Therefore, every “we” must always be understood as a semblance, as a site of our own (de)composition, and never one that we merely inherit as a substantiality: this is one amongst the many lessons of Tanigawa.

6. Filmic Materiality and the Figuration of History

I'm what you call a naïve moviegoer. I'm especially hostile to the notion of different levels: a first, a second, and a third level of meaning, understanding or appreciation. What works on the second level already works on the first. What fails on the first level remains a failure on every level. Every image is literal and must be taken literally. When an image is flat, you must not impart to it, even in thought, a depth that would disfigure it. What is most difficult is grasping images how they are presented, in their immediacy....In any case, an image does not represent some prior reality; it has its own reality.

– G. Deleuze

運動は物質が身を以て語る言葉だ。

Movement is a language in which matter speaks through bodies.

– Tosaka Jun

When treated as a broad field for the production of concepts, the debate on Japanese capitalism and its effects on Marxist theoretical writing within modern Japanese social thought resulted in extensive reverberations in numerous fields of inquiry. In addition to the concept of “origin,” which we have seen recurrently in these analyses, this field of questions and concepts also constitutes an intervention or problematization of the concept of “history” itself. The national question, broadly speaking, is always involved with a philosophy of history, in one sense or another. It cannot be otherwise, precisely because the national question is always a form of inquiry into the nature of *historical time*. It is a question principally concerned, as we have seen in previous chapters, with the character of the concept “world” – how “one world” could encompass numerous and diverse organizations of social phenomena, forms of periodization and ordering, mechanisms of legitimation and bordering, and so forth. In other words, when we

investigate the national question, what we are really investigating, in a deeper sense, is the nature of *historicity* itself: how and in what ways human phenomena can be understood as properly historical, that is, implicated in the process of social formation through which they emerged, and are historically linked – *irreparably* linked – to the diverse effects that social forms continue to generate, albeit through transformations both extensive and intensive. The national question, which always attempts to identify and explain the various factors that led to the historical trajectory of development *through the nation-form*, is involved from the very beginning with the notion that history itself can never be a stable or fixed archive of data, concepts, or markers. Rather, because the form of the nation itself is a mechanism through which phenomena are somewhat “overcoded” or socially inscribed into a particular register, it alerts us to a specific feature of the nature of history itself, to which we must now turn: history as creation. The national question, linked to these two broad fields of origin and history, can never be understood as a set of questions that are merely subsequent to the presumption of the givenness of the nation-form: rather, the national question tries to understand *why these specific phenomena, in diverse instances, became elements that could be fused into the nation-form, which would then retroactively testify to the ‘necessity’ of the nation*. Here, to an extent, we are thrown onto one of the most complicated problems related to the national question: the clarification of those elements that will be later identified as “proto-national.” At precisely the same historical moment as the first writings of Uno Kōzō, Yamada Moritarō, and many other important Marxist historians and economists, another modality of historical analysis, one that existed in a kind of permanent “missed encounter” with Marxist political economy, was the work of the Marxist philosopher Tosaka Jun.. But his

interests did not lie solely in philosophical exegesis. Rather, he was most fundamentally concerned with the everyday, the phenomena of the streets, the forms of life practice that obtained at this specific historical conjuncture in Japan of the 1920s and 30s, not in order to merely celebrate their particularity, but rather to examine them from the standpoint that these types of “custom” (*fūzoku*) – a somewhat complex and polyvalent term – gave us a glimpse into the work of history itself, the history of the present, a living history.

* * *

In a well-known and incessantly recirculated moment, Jacques Derrida deploys the term *paleonymie* for the utilization of an existing, sedimented word or phrase to indicate and develop a new and unaddressed problematic.¹ In precisely the same sense, I want to argue here that the decisive sequence for the theorization of the problem in question is nothing other than the possibility of the renewal and intensification of a certain paleonym: historical materialism. But historical materialism in what sense? Between the Marx and Engels of historical necessity (the “inevitable” transition to socialism through the development of the productive forces) and the Marx and Engels of the revolutionary workers’ movement (“the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle”), we might profitably question today certain new forms of social organization and their accompanying ordering apparatuses, by returning to all the “original questions”: the materiality of the social-historical, and the historicity of the articulation process of practice between the extensive traces of the past sedimented in

¹ Jacques Derrida, “Hors livre, préfaces,” in *La dissémination* (Seuil, 1972), especially 9-12. See also Gerhard Richter’s related extension of this problematic towards the *Denkbild* or “thought-image” in his recent *Thought-Images: Frankfurt School Writers’ Reflections from Damaged Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).

matter, and the intensive, unstable, hazardous zone of the present. In recent years, it has been a well-known theoretical task to draw attention to the immaterial moment conditioning the newly emerging forms of labor which capitalism still now, and will for the foreseeable future, continue to rely on. But there is also another task, a task that has an essential genealogy within Marxian theoretical writing, one intimately related to the work and project of Tosaka Jun: to draw attention, to place renewed emphasis and investigation on the essential and central material moment at the core of the immaterial forms and phenomena rapidly becoming the hegemonic social reality. Increasingly, what is being put into question from a variety of theoretical vantage points is precisely the *materiality* of capitalism, the materiality of social relations that obtain under its aegis, and the central role of matter itself in its analysis. Tosaka's thought, and in particular, the unique position of film within his analysis of the everyday, can be a pivotal site from which to attempt to renew the force and decisive meaning of historical materialism today, a site from which we can learn a great deal about the inexhaustible creative potential still latent in the critical analysis of the present.

From the outset it must be said that Tosaka's discussion of film is not comprehensive. Because of his untimely death and his short period of theoretical production, we can only treat his film-theoretical discussions as an outlining of a sequence of problems rather than as a developed and exhaustive system. In this sense, "film" in Tosaka functions as a productive absence, something *we* can develop, a set of relations and connections *we* can articulate. It is a term which *enables* our analysis precisely because it remains a name for an open and productive site of possibility. Rather than merely registering our regret that Tosaka never devoted a full book-length treatment

to the problem of film we ought to develop ourselves the meaning and significance of the fact that Tosaka considered film such a crucial site of analysis for the epistemic grasp of social life in general, a problem which surely remains decisive today. In this sense we should, at the very outset, draw attention to the order of presentation of the primary text under consideration here: Tosaka's 1936 *Shisō to fūzoku* [Thought and Custom], a text in which, after Tosaka broadly defines the concept, the very first demonstration of the question of custom is effected through the example of film, in the essay "Eiga no shajitsuteki tokusei to fūzokusei oyobi taishūsei." Further, the final text appended to the republication of this volume is his only other sustained writing on film, the 1937 essay "Eiga to eiga geijutsu: Abusutorakushon no sayō e," essentially locating the point of departure as well as the culmination of the text in the question of film. That is, even merely from the order of presentation in this work we can see the conceptual centrality and importance of film for Tosaka as a moment or instance of the broader problematic of custom – the historical materiality of social practices.

As one of the central animators of the influential Tokyo-based pre- and inter-war Marxist theoretical organization *Yuibutsuron kenkyūkai* (*Yuiken*) or "Materialism Research Group,"² Tosaka would certainly have been familiar with the existing film theoretical debates of the time, and the two aforementioned articles that he specifically devoted to film were originally published in the journal *Eiga sōzō*, a periodical closely associated with *Yuiken*. These articles sparked a short-lived debate amongst some *Yuiken* members and other intellectuals on the epistemology of film (*eiga ninshikiron ronsō*),³

² On the history of *Yuiken* see for instance Gozai Yoshishige's *Senjika no yuibutsuronsha tachi* (Tokyo: Aoki Shoten, 1982).

³ My object in the present essay is to examine and develop the filmic moment in Tosaka's philosophy, rather than to examine the specific historical circumstances and historical trajectory

but Tosaka himself would not revisit the question of film in an extended way again before his untimely death in prison in 1945. Tosaka did however, refer to film in other writings of his: in his discussion and overview of epistemology, *Ninshikiron to wa nani ka*, and in a variety of shorter, journalistic pieces (such as his 1936 article “Thought and Custom under Censorship” (“Ken’etsuka no shisō to fūzoku”),⁴ wherein he examines the censorship of the Japanese film industry as the exemplary case of the censoring of life custom in general).

What I have already stated from the very outset is that for Tosaka, film, or more specifically, the social materiality encountered in the filmic situation, was the quintessential location of custom, and that custom was the key to his characteristic theoretical interventions into historical materialism itself. Thus, we need to establish the contours of the sense of historical materialism I intend here. As the starting point of historical materialism, we can accept Engels’ foundational point that the “real unity of the world consists in its materiality, and this is proved not by a few juggled phrases, but by a long and wearisome development of philosophy and natural science.”⁵ But the question thus becomes: in what does this materiality consist, in what ways is matter thus cognizable, and what is the fundamental relation between this “materiality” of the “real unity,” and the “immateriality” of other “unities” of the world? The basic programmatic statement that “the materialist conception of history starts from the proposition that the

of film-theory in Japan of the 1920s and 30s. Abé Mark Nornes has already extensively detailed the circumstances, groups, debates, and movements in which Tosaka’s essays can be historically situated. See his *Japanese Documentary Film: The Meiji Era through Hiroshima* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), especially his comprehensive discussion of Iwasaki Akira, Tosaka, and Nakai Masakazu’s engagement with film, 125-147.

⁴ See “Ken’etsuka no shisō to fūzoku” in *Sekai no ikkan toshite no Nihon* in *Tosaka Jun zenshū* [hereafter *THZ*], vol. 5 (Keisō Shobō, 1966).

⁵ Frederick Engels, *Anti-Dühring* in *MECW*, vol. 25 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1987), 41.

production, and next to production, the exchange of things produced, is the basis of all social structure,” is well known and was largely the basic starting point of historical materialism as a doctrine. But, as Derek Sayer, among others, has pointed out, it is entirely debatable whether “historical materialism” was ever meant to be articulated as a philosophy of history in its sense of the full and conclusive level of the concept – for Marx and Engels, it is rather the “guiding thread,” an “orientation” in research.⁶

This is precisely the sense in which Engels later extensively disclosed his misgivings as to the “utilization” of this notion:

According to the materialist view of history, the determining factor in history is, *in the final analysis (das in letzter Instanz bestimmende Moment)*, the production and reproduction of actual life (*wirklichen Lebens*). More than that was never maintained by Marx or myself. Now if someone distorts this by declaring the economic moment to be the *only* determining factor, he changes that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, ridiculous piece of jargon.⁷

This clarification of the task and role of historical materialism is essential, in my view, for a complex understanding of Tosaka’s thought. A selective and violent reading of Tosaka’s work (especially up until the early-mid 1930s) can create an image of his materialism as a staid, orthodox, and formalistic doctrine. But Tosaka’s subtle grasp of this problem of the “reproduction of actual life (*wirklichen Lebens*),” in particular, his implicit attempt to read this reproduction in a productive deviation through film (the camera’s “reproduction” of social life, or *jisschasei*) demonstrates to us the novelty and dynamism of his thought, a thought which gives us powerful tools for the redeployment of historical materialism. Harry Harootunian has effectively summarized Tosaka’s grasp of this problem in general as follows:

⁶ Derek Sayer, *The Violence of Abstraction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 13-14.

⁷ Engels, letter of 21 September 1890 to Joseph Bloch in *Marx-Engels Werke*, bd. 37 [hereafter *MEW*] (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1967), 463-465; *MECW*, vol. 49 (New York: International Publishers, 2005), 34-36.

With Tosaka, the refiguring of historical materialism revealed the shadow of both Kant and Heidegger (as it did Benjamin) rather than Hegel and Lukács and allowed him to emplot a history from the present, rather than a fixed past, from material existence in the now, the “current situation” that would subsequently recall a certain past, rather than from a past that would undoubtedly forget the present.... Tosaka’s program hinged on a critique of received categories of historical temporality that all historicisms presumed as given: the temporality that mediated both the trajectory of the succession of events and the causal relationships supplying it coherence.⁸

In precisely the sense that Harootunian outlines here, we might positively juxtapose and imbricate Tosaka’s historical materialism with the tasks set forward by Althusser thirty years later. Althusser’s claim, contrary to its typical or superficial presentation, was in this sense not to demonstrate the primacy of the dialectical materialist method over the “doctrine” of historical materialism, but rather *to restore to historical materialism the dimension of history itself*, which is irretrievably lost in one-dimensional subjectivist understandings (such as those of Sorel, Marcuse, etc) of historical materialism as the “philosophy of the proletariat.” Such a reduction inevitably flattens historical materialism into the mere practice of partisanship, or guiding philosophy of voluntarism and engagement. Rather the historical materialism as “guiding thread” of Althusser (and I would argue, Tosaka) aims at the materiality of historicity itself, that is, the “continent of history,” the irreducible material moment which underpins as substratum every irruption of history as contingent evental site within the constantly swaying, non-linear flow of temporality. Tosaka’s theory of historical materialism therefore, is a complex field of singular crystallizations of matter and time, an analysis of the “infinite number of parallelograms of forces (*Kräfteparallelogrammen*), productive of one result – the

⁸ Harry Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture, and Community in Interwar Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 137.

historical event (*geschichtliche Ergebnis*).”⁹

This notion of historical materialism, that is, the historicity of matter and the materiality of historical life, must of necessity demand an epistemology, a theory of knowledge and cognition that can account for ideology, for the cognitive level and experience of the social-conceptual forces in a given conjuncture. On this point, we must begin from the history of epistemology in Marxist theory, and in particular from Lenin. It is unquestionable that Tosaka was in comprehensive agreement with the basic elements of Leninist epistemology, but, I will argue, his discussion and analysis of film, or rather his attempt to place the filmic situation at the core of his social epistemology, marks a decisive break from Lenin in a variety of essential ways. In expounding his highly influential “reflection theory” of knowledge, Lenin developed and defended what he termed his extension of the “general thesis” of historical materialism: that “social consciousness *reflects* social being.”¹⁰ As is well known now, this thesis was mechanically and formalistically employed in a variety of directions within Marxist theory, resulting in the arid and vacant aesthetic-theoretical apparatus of “socialist realism,” and the ludicrous, appalling excesses of forms of “proletarian science” such as Lysenkoism. Nevertheless, for Tosaka and similar Marxist theorists attempting to develop new ways of understanding the concrete social reality of the everyday, Lenin’s basic point remained essential – once you “deny objective reality, given us in sensation, you have lost every weapon against fideism.”¹¹ But in turning specifically to Tosaka’s grasp of film, I would like to argue that he takes on board Lenin’s basic conceptual point,

⁹ Engels, letter of 21 September 1890 to Joseph Bloch in *MEW*, bd. 37, 464; *MECW*, vol. 49, 35.

¹⁰ V.I. Lenin, *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* in *Collected Works of V.I. Lenin* [hereafter *LCW*], vol. 14 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), 323.

¹¹ Lenin, *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* in *LCW*, vol. 14, 344.

yet refines it as a tool of analysis for the “reproduction of actual life” by emphasizing the problematic of what he calls “custom” (*fūzoku*).

Rather than a “reflection theory” of epistemology, I would like to refer to Tosaka’s epistemic interventions as a *refraction theory*, one that develops and mobilizes the decisive characteristics of *the film-form as an organ of cognition*. It would be difficult to argue that he effectively and totally overcame the Leninist epistemology of reflection theory, but Tosaka does redirect the question of reflection into one of refraction in order to encompass the *ideational determination of matter in the subject*, that is, the operation *in* cognition of matter. This today is exceptionally important for new materialist theoretical analyses of film and the primacy of the image as the unit of circulation. If reflection theory as exemplified by *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* seems today mechanistic in its theorization of ideation as unilateral reflection of the basic material conjuncture, I would nevertheless like to suggest that, *pace* Tosaka, it is *refraction* that needs to be reconsidered as a dynamic multidirectional operation which can allow us to examine the mutual forms of articulation between the materiality of the image and its ideational structure in cognition. This is why Tosaka’s distinctive placement of the film-form within the logic of custom or everyday morality remains an incisive theoretical wager.

In contrast to the classical mobilization of historical materialism (for example, Stalin’s contribution to the *History of the CPSU(B)-Short Course*), to reinvigorate the standpoint and practice of the materialist view of history is to emphasize not the aspect of necessity. Rather, it is contingency that operates here as the decisive problem of history: Tosaka points out the essential role played in the continual, constant creation of

everydayness by film, and incisively relates this directly to “custom.” One might well ask – today, at a moment when the domination of film-form (or rather, its successors, the real-time TV image, the online participatory image etc), when the primacy of the image and its planar depth is nearly total, why revisit Tosaka's prewar series of speculative remarks on film as “custom”? An essential reason amongst others is that for Tosaka, the film itself as a planar image was less interesting as a site of analysis than the fullness of the void space lying between the operation of the film in time, and the audience's *practices* of perception, that is, Tosaka was primarily interested in film as one amongst a set of historical, formative-constitutive practices related to the everyday forms of subjectivation that obtained for viewers of films – for him, film is the quintessential moment in which historical materialism becomes the most foundational “guiding thread” for the affirmative, joyous grasp of everyday social-historical life.

He sets in motion his considerations with the statement that what interests him is not the total film-experience, in other words, the cinema as a total social site, but the social-historical implications of “the content that appears on the screen itself.” It is this element of the screen for Tosaka that is essential, the apparatus or surface on and through which content manifests itself into and in relation to the social – that is, it is “the screen” which “gives movement to the visual senses.”¹² Vision and the active, practical dimension of seeing is a critical element for Tosaka for the constitution-formation process and maintenance of the specifically social field, and therefore, it is an essential element of what is particular to film:

Vision itself possesses the characteristics of the touch, the caress. In contrast to the temporal continuity of hearing, it has a feeling of the tension of spatial

¹² Tosaka Jun, “Eiga no shajitsuteki tokusei to fuzokusei oyobi taishūsei” (1936) in *Shisō to fūzoku*, in *THZ* 4: 283.

continuity. Touch is just the same. We can say that, in its general meaning, for the *cognition of actuality*, vision, more than hearing, has a fundamental significance. It is film that places its emphasis on precisely this sense of vision.¹³

In other words, vision, when bracketed by the film-apparatus immediately encounters a field of sensations that are normally dissociated from the visual: the tactile, the affective or sensory elements of physical contact, or embodiedness. In the presumed normal order of the senses, vision is both elevated above the other senses, as in the privileging of the visual register of the social field, but simultaneously demoted to the austere, non-sensory, non-intuitional zone of the high “arts.” But Tosaka attempts to draw our attention precisely to the way in which film immediately gives rise to another sense of vision, one separated from this classical, or traditional understanding of seeing. That is, in the filmic situation (and its exemplary role as refraction device of the “cognition of actuality” [*jitsuzai no ninshiki*]), vision itself becomes a prosthetic limb, a spatial apparatus through which one “touches” the imbricated spaces of historical content overlapping between the diegetic *socius* and the social body in which the filmic situation intervenes.

In other words, he argues, “this ‘seeing’ is not merely contemplation, but a practical measure (*jissaiteki shochi*) taken in relation to things.”¹⁴ This practical measure taken by the viewer stems from the particularity of the filmic sense of vision – that is, the viewer encounters the filmic thing (*jibutsu*) through this prosthetic acting-seeing, and in doing so, by objectivizing the filmic object and therefore relativizing it in relation to oneself as filmic subject, encounters the “content on the screen” *in* history, and in a practical manner. Within the filmic situation, one can only resort to the contemplative moment in as much as one denies precisely what is filmic; contemplation is an aesthetic

¹³ Tosaka, *THZ* 4: 283.

¹⁴ Tosaka, *THZ* 4: 283.

comportment superceded by the cinema.

Therefore, for Tosaka, the question that immediately emerges (and which he will return to later in his second essay) is the problem of the aesthetic classification of the filmic in relation to the “arts” or to the “reality” specific to art. He argues, “In other words, what we must consider is not the problem of artistic reality (*geijutsuteki riariti*), but reality in the sense of the regeneration of actual existence (*jitsuzai saisei*) – if we attempt to consider this in relation to film, we can see that in this sense, it is film which fulfills the most real content of vision. The content which appears on the screen is that which is the most concrete.”¹⁵ We must pay close attention here to the term “regeneration” (*saisei*), which we could also translate as “playback,” “replay,” “reproduction” and so forth. What changes everything for Tosaka in the filmic situation is that in the “emergence” or “birth” (*sei*) of the new, there is a type of repetition (*sai*) in which two or more temporal sequences or crystallizations of historicity smoothly collide in an encounter (the spacing or distance of the seeing and the screen). It is this situation that necessitates a totally different conception of vision, because in the repeating oscillation of some aspect of “reality,” the viewing of the filmic situation furnishes the viewer with access to something like the flux of the object in history itself, that is, a flux in which the present and past are articulated to each other in a dense, thick movement that can only be encountered in the content of the screen as social surface.

Tosaka then introduces us to another term for this problematic: “this is what we might call film’s ‘reproduction of the present’ (*shajitsu*), which is nothing other than the reproduction of a random portion (in fact there are already various social, literary, artistic, etc perspectives on how this portion comes to be chosen, camera angles and so forth) of

¹⁵ Tosaka, *THZ* 4: 284.

actual reality as it occurs on the earth.”¹⁶ He does not mean here something naïve, such as the notion that the filmic content is an artistic facsimile of some concrete “reality.”

Rather, what he is pointing at here is the essential “difference in repetition” through which the film situation allows the viewer to encounter a shard or fragment of historical temporality, not on the level of the concept, but on an affective level in which the viewer has no choice but to encounter a process of subjectivation, because of the necessity of taking a “practical measure” in relation to the filmic thing. That is, in a broad sense for Tosaka, “repetition is never a historical fact, but rather the historical condition under which something new is effectively produced.”¹⁷ Mary Ann Doane has identified on a general level precisely the same overall problematic that Tosaka schematically pointed out in 1936:

The present as point of discontinuity marks the promise of something other, something outside of systematicity. This otherness is perhaps more accurately the lure not only of the nonsystematic but of the anti-systematic. But the present instant also and simultaneously poses a threat, that of meaningless, pure and uncontrollable contingency. Hence, it is contained but at the same time deployed. Its appeal as that which is asystematic, spontaneous, is, in many respects, deceptive; for chance, contingency, the present moment become themselves the building blocks of a system designed to deal with asystematicity. Such a logic is closer to that of statistics and probability than to that of narrative. But the two logics are subtly interwoven and coordinated in the cinema’s ‘reproduction of the present.’¹⁸

It is exactly this element of contingency that changes everything in the filmic sensation of vision from the contemplative logic of the art object. Because of its element of repetition and reproduction of the present, a present which is cleaved from its existing, sedimented

¹⁶ Tosaka, *THZ* 4: 284.

¹⁷ Deleuze, *Différence et répétition* (Paris: PUF, 1968), 121; *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 90.

¹⁸ Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 106.

past, and “regenerated” in the viewer’s present, thereby forming a new process of articulation to the past as *fait accompli*, film is itself a recombination apparatus for the glimpsing of the contingent combinatory effects of history. As Doane points out, this element of the image-time and its movement is hazardous and full of potential, which is precisely why the struggles to control the space of partial determinacy in the image are so fierce.

But specifically how, and in what ways, does this cinematic space of recombination intersect with the elements of the social field in general? That is, specifically where in the social field are the edges and points of film bisecting the existing situation? Tosaka is constantly reminding his reader that film is something totally new, that film cannot be understood through its aesthetic classification, but only by means of what is proper to film itself. Thus he writes, “the newspapers do not tell us what manners of speech are employed, or what color eyes can be seen among the masses in a social event, or in the actions of the masses in a plaza, but it is indeed the camera which presents to us precisely this sort of crucial literary spectacle.”¹⁹ In other words, filmic reality has an aesthetic quality, or comes to possess certain artistic characteristics, only in as much as it has a certain fundamental distance, only in as much as it is subtracted from the dimension of “art.” But Tosaka’s compelling example of for instance, speech patterns and forms (accent, pronunciations, diction, mannerisms, quirks, etc) and facial expressions and features (mood, disposition, temper, character, eye color, facial movements, tics, etc) draws our attention to the bracketing dimension of social materiality so crucial to the epistemological consequences of the film-form. Film is thus for Tosaka a surface or plane on which certain social intensities circulate, forming new

¹⁹ Tosaka, *THZ* 4: 285.

connections and combinations, where these intensities are removed from the systems of signification in which they are employed on an everyday level and re-routed into different orders of referral. Tosaka constantly therefore emphasizes this separational and recombinatory aspect of the film situation, “especially in the way the affect-image constitutes an order of pure events by separating intensive qualities from bodily states.”²⁰ By recasting these intensities in different lines of relation, film expresses on the level of its own abstract totality the montage-effect or articulation process of history itself, in the historical event’s singular capacity to retrospectively ground its emergence in what were originally contingent circumstances.

It is precisely at such a subtracted moment that film becomes something artistic, irrespective of its genre classification. Thus Tosaka claims, “I certainly want to emphasize that social commentary on current events is another modality with a crucial literary dimension, but that is precisely because it is this *actual reality* (*genjitsuteki riaritī*) itself – not “artistic” reality – which possesses this artistic value.”²¹ In this sense, the artistic dimension of film stems not from its elements of style, form, or technique, but from its quality of repetition or regeneration. Thus, by initiating sequences of constant regeneration (the “playback” of reality from one crystallized instant to another), the capacity of film to formally parallel the operation of historical temporality places the viewer in a primal artistic situation of direct access to the operation of technique itself.

If this is the case, however, we have to clarify the question of the relation or relay-effect between the “content of the screen,” the screen itself, the viewer, and so forth.

Thus when Tosaka inquires into the problem of why film demands a new recombinatory

²⁰ Jacques Rancière. *La fable cinématographique* (Paris: Seuil, 2001); *Film Fables*, trans. Emiliano Battista (New York: Berg, 2006), 112.

²¹ Tosaka, *THZ* 4: 285.

operation for the separation and employment of certain social intensities, he states, “what most basically exemplifies this demand for “information-gathering,” “observation,” “examination,” and so on, is nothing other than the screen itself.”²² In other words, the screen makes certain demands; the screen itself has a certain detectable intensive relation of affect to the filmic content that circulates on it, and it is the consequent question of prosthesis that emerges to concretize the form of materiality at work here.

In his later essay “Eiga to eiga geijutsu: Abusutorakushon no sayō e” (1937), Tosaka concludes by directing this question to a new focus on the film apparatus as an organ of cognition:

But there is a more foundational determination of film than the question of whether or not it constitutes film art: the fact that it also signifies a new human cognitive capacity (*ninshiki nōryoku*). Film is a name for a means of cognition (*ninshiki shudan*) or a function of cognition (*ninshiki kinō*).²³

Tosaka here identifies something critical in the way film operates. That is, it is precisely “the everyday experience of cinema that gives us to ‘see’, quite unpretentiously, the apodictically reduced, phenomenological object of cognition.”²⁴ Buck-Morss refers to “the screen as prosthesis” in order to draw our attention to its function as an organ of cognition – “the surface of the cinema screen functions as an artificial organ of cognition. The prosthetic organ of the cinema screen does not merely duplicate human cognitive perception, but changes its nature.”²⁵ That is, the essential dynamics of film viewing operate at a complex remove from the situation of contemplation: the viewer watches the

²² Tosaka, *THZ* 4: 285.

²³ Tosaka, *THZ* 4: 468.

²⁴ Susan Buck-Morss, “The Cinema Screen as Prosthesis of Perception: A Historical Account” in *The Senses Still: Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity*, ed. C. Nadia Seremetakis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 46.

²⁵ Buck-Morss, “The Cinema Screen as Prosthesis of Perception,” 48.

screen onto which the film is projected, therefore making the screen itself the essential site of mediation between the social situation of viewing and its cognitive intersection on the level of affect with the film-content.

This problematic is fundamentally related to the structure of social-material relationality in general, in other words, the relativizing (or objectifying) moment of relation itself: “when I relate myself to myself as if to something which is directly another, then my relationship is a material one.”²⁶ Marx’s point can be understood in exactly this sense which Tosaka identifies in film’s “cognitive capacity” and which Buck-Morss refers to as its “prosthesis.” When I watch a film, I essentially watch something that watches the film on behalf of me, that is, the screen. Thereby I am essentially inserted into a prosthetic vision of myself, because in as much as the screen is watching film-content for me, I am encountering myself in a dislocational experience as refracted through a series of “practical measures” in relation to the screen. Immediately therefore, this objectivized experience of myself *as other* is inserted into a social-material relation to the film-content by means of the screen as organ of cognitive mediation. Thus the relationship between the self and the prosthetic organ of the screen establishes a certain spacing, an opening of the materiality of affect between the self and the social-historical itself. Thus we can quickly understand why Tosaka considered this element of film to be such a powerful site for the analysis of the materiality of social relations in general:

The fundamental problem for film theory is that we must consider film to be first and foremost something epistemological. It is the epistemic modality, under the effect of what is proper to film itself, through which we can first grasp its artistic nature. The fundamental problem is not whether or not film itself is an art, or how a certain film might be considered artistic, but rather prior to this, there is the

²⁶ Marx, *Difference between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature* in *MECW*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), 53.

question of film as a means of cognition, the actual analysis of what role film plays in the history of human cognition. I do not mean here merely that because film has its own particular artistic characteristics or indicates a more general function, we ought to respect it. Rather, we require an awareness (*jikaku*) adequate to the fact that film itself is a progressive cognitive function of humanity (*jinrui no shimpōteki na ninshiki kinō*). Of course, it is entirely correct that film should be understood in a mass sense (*tsūzoku ni*) as an art or (it amounts to the same thing) as leisure, but this cannot serve as a point of departure for the principles of a theory of film. The problem that poses itself to us is that we must precisely grasp the significance of this general artistic sensibility and leisure on the level of a theory of epistemology. For such a question, film is the most suggestive object of analysis.²⁷

Film itself, in its role identified here by Tosaka, as a “progressive cognitive function for humanity,” can only be understood in as much as its filmic character is emphasized.

Certainly, Tosaka was not hesitant to criticize the film industry, and in particular “big film capital,” for its sycophantic and collaborationist relation to government censorship. For instance, he argues, “even if we talk of the rationalization of censorship, it is not in fact a truly rational rationalization, that is, it is not an attempt at a certain critical resistance to censorship on a rational basis. Rather, big film capital and the authorities enter into an agreement regarding censorship before the fact, and end up rationalizing the most irrational uneconomic things, as in the example of the Nikkatsu Co. talkie *Nozokareta hanayome* [The Missing Bride] for which they re-recorded every single line of dialogue.”²⁸ But Tosaka was always careful to distinguish this type of critique of the structures of production and circulation of film from his arguments about the film-form, or about the filmic moment of everyday social materiality. I want to emphasize that what is particularly interesting and powerful about Tosaka’s understanding of film is precisely his sense of affirmation, his relentlessly affirmative grasp of the filmic moment’s social

²⁷ Tosaka, *THZ* 4: 468-469.

²⁸ Tosaka, “Bunka tōsei no shujusō” (1935) in *Gendai Nihon no shisō tairitsu* in *THZ* 5, 247.

potential, and the cognitive operation that it opens and sustains. This separation of the analysis of the power of the cinematic image (whose deployment can function in any number of political contexts, such as the propaganda film) from the epistemological function of film in general as a refraction device of social relationality itself is perhaps the most important methodological intervention Tosaka made in relation to film.

But his emphasis on cognition, and by extension on the processes of subjectivation experienced by the viewer in the filmic situation leads us to position his theoretical discussion in relation to another later trend of film theory, one which Tosaka would find much to agree with, and also much that jars with his affirmative grasp of the social potentiality of film as a means of cognition. I mean by this to indicate “apparatus theory,” the trend that characterized the dominant strands of film theoretical writing of the 70s and 80s, largely associated with the *Cahiers du cinéma* and *Screen*, and critics such as Baudry, Mulvey, and so forth. This tendency emphasized the total “apparatus” of the cinematic as a device designed to interpellate specific types of subjects, designed to produce certain effects of subjectivation in the viewer. Apparatus theory certainly strived to produce a strong materialist analysis of the film-situation, and quite correctly placed significant emphasis on the institutional elements of this process of viewership, but tended toward a largely negative view of the violent subjectivation of the viewer. Baudry can be considered exemplary of this violent consideration of subjectivation:

The cinematographic apparatus is unique in that it offers the subject perceptions ‘of a reality’ whose status seems similar to that of representations experienced as perception... Cinema, like dream, would seem to correspond to a temporary form of regression, but whereas dream, according to Freud is merely a ‘normal hallucinatory psychosis’, cinema offers an artificial psychosis without offering the dreamer the possibility of exercising any kind of immediate control.²⁹

²⁹ Jean-Louis Baudry, “The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in the Cinema” in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, ed. Philip Rosen (New York:

For Baudry, film operates as a nightmare – a semi-kinetic, ideational experience of facticity disconnected absolutely from spectator agency, a kind of cognitive straitjacket that both enables a certain realism and yet disables the act. Thus, the viewer as social subject, as an individual in the social-historical world, essentially plays no part in the film-situation, but is simply overawed and operated on passively by the parasitic force of the apparatus as a totality. Sean Homer has recently revisited these debates on the history of apparatus theory (in particular, its mobilization of psychoanalysis), arguing that “the idea that there is a single structuring principle that constitutes us as subjects or cinema spectators is probably the most discredited idea of the whole *Screen* project.”³⁰ This problem of the subjective element of the filmic situation cannot be clarified through the tendency of apparatus theory to place the balance of force into a broad totality of the film-apparatus. Rather for Tosaka, the film “apparatus,” if we can even retain this phraseology, is not a total institutional force, but a fluctuating surface of relationality on which is inscribed a semi-solid recombination of elements that correspond to – or more specifically, *refract* – the social field of the prevailing mode of production. He refuses absolutely the *diamat* style of reductivism and functionalism, in that he never argues that the film-situation is merely an *expression* of the dominant social relations. Instead, he emphasizes that the film apparatus is a refraction and collage device, a device constantly concretizing and dispersing sketches of relationality itself, a relationality that operates not

Columbia University Press, 1986), 314.

³⁰ Sean Homer, “Cinema and Fetishism: The Disavowal of a Concept” in *Historical Materialism* 13.1 (2005), 113-114. For reasons of length and topicality, I cannot take up the main arguments of Homer’s article which are powerfully articulated, and though I have certain misgivings about his concluding remarks in the direction of “culture,” I am in a basic agreement with his attempt to “avoid the over-valorization of representation” while retaining “the idea of underlying structures as constitutive of subjectivity.”

only through the “determination in the last instance” of the superstructure by the base, but a relationality that images and aggregates into new recombined patterns the material moments of various ideological, physiological, and other intensities, beliefs, everyday practices, habits, styles, attitudes, social improvisations, new encounters, aspirations, and so forth. He calls this entire field “custom,” a problem I will return to shortly.

In as much as I argue that Tosaka’s understanding of the film-subjection of the viewer cannot be reduced to the problematics opened by the debates of apparatus theory or its succeeding logics, we must revisit this question of what is actually operative in film aesthetics. Tosaka states as follows:

I want to draw attention to the limitations of the filmic-artistic itself when examined from the vantage point of film as a whole. In other words, it is a fact that when one hears the word ‘film’ within society in general, one immediately thinks of the *art of film* – thus, in common sense, film is considered something internal to art, and this equation itself is considered to be something obvious, something which goes without saying: of course, this view is mistaken. The cultural commodities offered to us on the streets are for the most part films as film art, but recently, *it is a fact of the streets (gaitō no jijitsu)* that the news film has been valued highly, and the news film is already absolutely not a type of film as art, nor representative of film art.³¹

Tosaka considers film under precisely this problem – the “facts of the streets.” In other words, he is less interested in how film might appear on the level of the concept than he is in the actual-material lines of connection drawn by the insertion of the filmic situation into the “streets,” into the flux of social life. But what does he mean by this consideration of “film” and “film art”? Essentially, he is drawing our attention to the fact that “in the prosthetic cognition of the cinema, the difference between documentary and fiction is thus effaced. Of course we still ‘know’ that they are different. But they inhabit the surface of the screen as cognitive equivalents. Both the real event and the staged event

³¹ Tosaka, *THZ* 4: 466.

are absent.”³² This is precisely why, “if we seriously examine the news film as a form, we can immediately understand that film itself can never be reduced to an art (*eiga ga kesshite geijutsu ni tsukinai koto ga wakaru*).”³³ On the level of the cognitive operation of the content on the screen, there is no meaningful differentiation of genre in as much genre is not something which alters the fundamental filmic situation: “genre itself can be determined by the given form of art, but whether or not something qualifies as “art” can never be determined solely on the basis of genre.”³⁴ That is, by drawing a series of distinctions between films on the basis of a system of aesthetics derived from the literary arts, the existing visual arts, the theater, and so forth, will inevitably result in an erasure or foreclosure of the specific dynamic motor-force of the filmic, which is the screen:

Thus a doubled consideration of the conception of film art is necessary here. The first point is that the general understanding of film is derived more than anything else from the common sense that it is an “art.” The second point is that film here is foreclosed by a series of stereotypes derived from a notion of the artistic stemming from an extra-filmic common sense.³⁵

By forcing film-function through the sieve of the prevailing conventions of aesthetic judgment, precisely the “function” element of film, which depends on the prosthetic cognitive operation of the screen and its simultaneous proximity and distance from the viewer, will be elided and forced into the background. Thus Tosaka starkly differentiates himself from aestheticized notions of the film-form: “I want to emphasize and draw our attention to something of far greater importance than whether or not these forms constitute “art” or not – the fact that before all else, they are forms of *film*.”³⁶ In other words, what Tosaka argues essentially, is that film constitutes “a place of intrinsic

³² Buck-Morss, “The Cinema Screen as Prosthesis of Perception,” 50.

³³ Tosaka, *THZ* 4: 466.

³⁴ Tosaka, *THZ* 4: 467.

³⁵ Tosaka, *THZ* 4: 467-468.

³⁶ Tosaka, *THZ* 4: 467.

indiscernability between art and non-art,”³⁷ and that it is this undecidable aspect of the filmic situation that is its social-historical potential, the site wherein an encounter with the essential materiality of the everyday becomes possible.

Badiou has strongly emphasized this point, in arguing that film’s element of the everyday, the fact that it “gathers around identifiably non-artistic materials, which are ideological indicators of the epoch,” means that film “intrinsically and not empirically”³⁸ is a *mass* phenomenon. This mass-character (*taishūsei*) is exactly the element Tosaka draws our attention to – it is critical to emphasize that Tosaka means something slightly different than the common-sensical understanding of the mass-character of the filmic situation. That is, he absolutely does not intend by this formulation to enter the discourse of “high” and “low” “culture.” His argument instead is that it is precisely this schematic of aesthetic judgment and contemplation, based on the prevailing hierarchies of taste, which obscures and elides the more fundamental elements of film, what he calls its “material function” and its “social-ontological conditions”:

It is the characteristic of the material function (*butsuriteki kinō*), indeed the condition of its social being (*shakaiteki sonzai jōken*), of film to necessitate a special interaction between some form of the artistic and the non-artistic. Precisely this point requires us to rethink the question of the artistic within the cinema, and this point can be an operation for the general re-examination of the concept as it extends to the totality of the artistic.³⁹

Tosaka does not refer to film as a “mass art” but rather points to its “mass-character” because the first formulation remains pegged to the discourse of “art,” and thereby enters the configurational zone of aesthetic judgment. Yet, Tosaka was not immune to or

³⁷ Alain Badiou, “Considérations sur l’état actuel du cinéma” in *L’art du cinéma* 24 (March 1999); “Philosophy and Cinema” in *Infinite Thought*, trans. Oliver Feltham and Justin Clemens (London: Continuum, 2003), 111.

³⁸ Badiou, “Philosophy and Cinema,” 113.

³⁹ Tosaka, *THZ* 4: 468.

incapable of aesthetic appreciation and analysis of film. For example, in the May 1st, 1937 issue of *Yuiken News*, Tosaka reported on the release of two films: *Ramona* (presumably the 1936 version directed by Henry King), and *The Garden of Allah* (1936, dir., Richard Boleslawski; Japanese title: *Sabaku no kaen* [Garden of the Desert]), both of which had been filmed in Technicolor, and wrote a short reflection on the meaning of the advent of the color film.⁴⁰

He begins by arguing that a characteristic aesthetic division between the theater and film had until that point been the role of color – this short piece is not theoretical in intention or in execution, but Tosaka does find something powerful in Technicolor. Although many have found it overwrought and gaudy, for Tosaka, the density and saturation of Technicolor is a kind of positive or affirmative exaggeration, one that intersects with the materiality of film itself, a “type of painterly *déformation*,” that shows us the “concentrated brilliance equivalent to viewing the reflections projected in the camera obscura.”⁴¹ But again, what Tosaka is interested in here is not necessarily the ability of film to mimic the hitherto existing aesthetic situation of contemplation, but rather the cognitive function it represents. Therefore, even in his casual remarks on the advent of Technicolor, Tosaka is keen to emphasize to us that this overwrought coloring

⁴⁰ Tosaka in general treats the film as form, that is, the ways in which film form is constitutive of and mutually imbricated with screen content. However, we should pay attention to the fact that Tosaka’s primary interest in specific films was located in *popular* or *mainstream* film productions. His interest in the “mass” element of film and its relation to the everyday stems from his identification of the film as a site of the concentration and deployment of popular fantasy in terms of the relation of the spectator to the screen as prosthetic organ of cognition. In other words, his film critique focused its attention on what Naoki Sakai has called “the spectator’s scopophilic drive” and the relation of this concentrated desire to the role of “film as a subjective technology.” See Naoki Sakai, *Nihon/eizō/Beikoku: kyōkan no kyōdōtai to teikokuteki kokuminshugi* (Seidosha, 2007), 183; 194.

⁴¹ See Tosaka, “Tennenshoku eigasan: Shikisai eiga no mondai” in *Yuiken nyūsu*, no. 70 (May 1, 1937), reprinted in *THZ*, supplemental volume (*bekkan*), 300-301.

itself has a material operation in which it functions to give us a certain epistemological access to the projection-situation itself, by displacing the camera-gaze, and allowing the viewer to observe as if they were touching directly upon the projection-element of the filmic apparatus. Thus, even in these cursory theorizations of the role of Technicolor, Tosaka emphasizes to us that “the projection mechanism allows the differential elements (the discontinuity inscribed by the camera) to be suppressed bringing the relation into play. The individual images as such disappear so that movement and continuity can appear. But movement and continuity are the visible expression of their relations, derived from the tiny discontinuities between the images.”⁴² Tosaka continuously and exhaustively emphasizes to us that to situate film in a contemplative, aestheticized manner is to violently disregard the cognitive function of film, the operations in which the film situation itself intersects, interacts, and interpenetrates the social body, forming a zone of flux in which the subjective dimension of matter can be encountered in a frontal fashion. This is why, “within the cinema, it is precisely “film,” not “art” which is the question. That is, the primary and fundamental question is the total function on the epistemic level (*ninshikijō no kinō zenpan*) of this thing we call “film.”⁴³

What this epistemic function of film then operates in accordance with is a certain problem of realism. But Tosaka refuses absolutely the sense of realism that is operative within the existing aesthetic discourse. Rather, he wants to emphasize that filmic realism is something highly specific, something unprecedented – something that, as Buck-Morss has also alluded to above, produces a sequence in which the cognitive function of film is not only *responded to* in viewership, but in which the filmic situation has actual-material

⁴² Baudry, “Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus” in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, 291.

⁴³ Tosaka, *THZ* 4: 468.

effects on cognition itself. It is this sequence of the realism that inheres in film in which its effect of the “reproduction of the present” (*jissasei*) appears as a diorama of the reproduction of “actual life” (*wirklichen Lebens*) and thereby creates a line of encounter with the “facts of the streets” (*gaitō no jijitsu*). Thus Tosaka argues:

In other words, film’s specific realism exists at the point when actual reality just as it is becomes artistic reality, and at the same time, at this same point, something else is revealed, something that confers a mass sense of satisfaction (*taishūteki na manzokukan*) that cannot be duplicated in art. This is something rather different from the question of the theatrical or artistic value that film ought to have – this “something” rather consists in the predetermined conditions (*sore izen no senketsu jōken*) that existed prior to this consideration of value – to ignore these conditions and directly criticize the theatrical or literary essence of film is perhaps to foreclose and reduce the filmic to merely an instance of theater or literature. The simple but complex fact that one can observe something on the screen in the same way as one observes the actuality of the world is sufficient to give us what is most interesting and specific to film as a form.⁴⁴

This element of filmic realism is, even more so than in Tosaka’s era, a decisive question for our moment. This “simple but complex fact” that the filmic situation as a totality cannot be easily dissociated from the social-historical moment in which the projection-situation exists, nor from the diegetic reproduction of life on the screen-surface, shows us what is most essential in film. It is this prosthetic dimension of the filmic moment – that film thinks for us, that we think by means of the filmic brain. This prosthesis is precisely what gives the filmic situation its central and “directorial” role in social life: it shows us frontally and visually how certain intensities are combined in order to form the combinations at the core of social life, the materiality itself in its conditions of flux just prior to concatenation into integral elements.

But Tosaka here also raises the question of “value,” exactly in relation to the social field film interacts with. Through the structure of value, film’s inherent social role

⁴⁴ Tosaka, *THZ* 4: 288-289.

is elided or converted into something other than what is proper to it, something other than the cognitive effect of the prosthetic screen. Indeed, “it is value that converts every product into a social hieroglyphic (*gesellschaftliche Hieroglyphe*). Later on, we try to decipher the hieroglyphic, to get behind the secret of our own social products; for to stamp an object of utility as a value, is just as much a social product as language.”⁴⁵ In order to “get behind” (we should think seriously of the phrasing here in relation to the screen) the “social hieroglyphic” of film’s mass-character, Tosaka refuses to reduce the filmic moment to the category of art, to reduce the historical dynamics of the filmic situation to a balance of “contemplation” or aesthetic distance, a movement that would eliminate precisely the flux of sociality that is so crucial for the position of film within his work. Therefore, in order to see what is behind this “social hieroglyphic” of the film-situation, we need to excavate more comprehensively the term he utilizes to situate film as a category: not “art” (*geijutsu*) but “custom” (*fūzoku*).

In asking what this realism specific to film is, Tosaka needs to clarify what “real” he relies on in the first place – thus he asks, “But what sort of thing constitutes the actual reality of society? In general, it appears by and large in the forms of custom (*fūbutsu*; *fūzoku*): it is the primary condition of film to show us these forms of custom.”⁴⁶ And in turn, we would want to inquire into what “custom” itself is. In this sense, custom for Tosaka is “a ground of material, affective, physical, and social embodiment” (*butteki de kankakuteki de nikutaiteki de shakaiteki na gushōsei no jiban*) and its “sensation” (*kankaku*).⁴⁷ Thus, “custom” in Tosaka allows him to produce, like the later Lukács, a

⁴⁵ Marx, *Das Kapital*, bd. 1 in *MEW*, bd. 23 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1962), 88; *Capital*, vol. 1 in *MECW*, vol. 35 (New York: International Publishers, 1996), 85.

⁴⁶ Tosaka, *THZ* 4: 286.

⁴⁷ Tosaka, *THZ* 4: 288.

contemporary analysis of “typicality” or “typicity,” that is, an analysis of the level of the social itself, or the mediated moment of the social-historical, which intervenes as an oscillating surface or as the “local” moment in the dialectic.⁴⁸

Moreover, Tosaka emphasizes that the cognitive function, in other words, the prosthetic operation of the filmic situation is a perfect means of encounter with this conception of custom: “what shows us these customs specifically as *form* is nothing other than the screen.”⁴⁹ That is, he emphasizes here that by means of the screen, we can encounter, for instance, not the raised eyebrow itself, but the eyebrow-intensity that combines differentially in the diegetic social field. We can thus encounter the abstract raised eyebrow, precisely because the screen itself *intuits* the social lines of affect and combination which the eyebrow-intensity relates to. There is no need, in the filmic situation, to “interpret” or to “infer meaning,” such as the notion that the raised eyebrow “connotes” suspicion, surprise, skepticism, distrust, and so forth. In fact, in the cinematic encounter, the eyebrow as a pure intensity in which significations are materially gathered is mobilized as a direct concatenation of various other affective intensities, thereby allowing us to “see” a kind of pure custom, custom in its subtractive dimension, shorn of the need to be “explained.” This element of the direct cognitive function of film is precisely what Tosaka intends by the notion of a “filmic realism” which shows us the sensation of custom as form. It is this affective connectivity to materiality which Tosaka finds most powerful in the analysis of custom:

Popular affect is the materialization of habituality (*shūzokusei*) or human relationality (*jinrin*) in consciousness, and custom is its materialization in the material, sensuous forms of clothing, architecture, behavior, facial expressions,

⁴⁸ See Stefan Morawski, “L’evoluzione della teoria lukacsiana matura dell’estetica” in *Il marxismo della maturità di Lukács*, ed. Guido Oldrini (Naples: Prismi, 1983), especially 118.

⁴⁹ Tosaka, *THZ* 4: 286.

and so on.⁵⁰

Custom mobilizes and creates lines of intensity whereby relationality itself appears. Custom in this sense is always a zone of partial determination, one in which the combinatory processes of the social-historical itself are in a state of constant improvisation, or spontaneously regenerated composition. It is in this sense that Tosaka perceives in the field of custom exactly the problems later theorized in terms of “performativity,” for instance, when he discusses “the secret of the uniform (*seifuku no himitsu*) or of garments that express class status.”⁵¹ He makes a particularly interesting aside here, in identifying the problem of gender as indicative of the state fear of the flux of custom, the state’s need to control and monitor this zone of improvisation:

In the male-female relation, which is the most primary site of custom, the question of the distinction between male and female clothing is an extremely serious one: the police are in fact, always on the lookout for men in women’s clothing and women in men’s clothing.⁵²

Tosaka does not develop this point further, but we should pay close attention to the fact that he mobilizes this example within his remarks on *film*. That is, the filmic situation is one in which the diegetic performativity of gender identification, through its filmic realism, interacts critically with the “facts of the streets,” by imaging/imagining forms of relation and performance that the state deems too unstable to be allowed. That is, the state necessarily feels the need to control and oversee “distinction” within custom, precisely because custom is a field in which different combinations are as possible as those combinations that have been inherited. The filmic screen, in its intersection and overlapping with the social field, reveals precisely this constitutive instability as potential.

⁵⁰ Tosaka, *THZ* 4: 286.

⁵¹ Tosaka, *THZ* 4: 286.

⁵² Tosaka, *THZ* 4: 287.

Tosaka further briefly develops this highly topical and political direction, at a time and in a conjuncture (1936) when it was no flippant task to call such logic into question, remarking, “Even those who can’t really grasp the abstract ideas of “national thought” (*kokumin shisō*) or the “national polity/body” (*kokutai*), nevertheless have no trouble directly understanding the notion of “Japanese customs” (*Nihonjin no fūzoku*). In fact, it is precisely in this fact that we might point to the concrete expression of this “national thought.”⁵³ Tosaka’s crucial point in relation to custom here is that this affective directness of custom as pure form, which circulates on the screen, has far more social force than the abstract propaganda formulations of the state. When the state continually emphasizes the need to serve the “national body” (*kokutai*), there is no difficulty in encountering this body when it appears, subtracted from its conceptual mobilization, as a pure intensity of bodies on the screen. There the national body can be apprehended as a virtuality, but precisely because the film-form mobilizes custom, the most concrete dimension of social-material life, such a national body is at the same time and for the first time, understandable in an direct, affective, kinetic manner such that its social effect is seamless. In other words, “It is film that first allowed us to see this sensation of custom itself, and it is in this affective sensibility, in other words, in its *sociality*, that we can find the most interesting elements of film. Within actuality, the social phenomenon becomes visible as custom.”⁵⁴ Tosaka theorizes this kinetic-affective element of the appearance of custom within the filmic situation as an “erotics,” as a question of “eroticism.” He writes:

If we refer to the erotic (vital-cultural [*seibutsteki bunkateki*]) moment of human society as “eroticism” in a detached manner, we can come to grasp its meaning as

⁵³ Tosaka, *THZ* 4: 287.

⁵⁴ Tosaka, *THZ* 4: 287.

the fundamental element of custom as a whole. Thus, it is an obvious fact that film, which enacts the destiny (*shukumei*) of this sensation of custom, which gives it its privileged status, never loses this aspect that constantly pursues the erotic (*fudan ni erotishizumu o tsuikyū suru sokumen*).⁵⁵

He continues: “Film demands of the audience a confrontation between the audience’s consciousness (life-consciousness, social consciousness, and so on) and the forms of custom that appear on the screen. This sense of custom, as has been discerned by numerous people, is connected to mankind through the universality of the sexual relation, and it is precisely this point that we can consider one of the foundations of the mass-character (*taishūsei*) possessed by film-content itself (Mankind’s consciousness of genus [*rui-ishiki*] emerges from sexual relations; *Menschengeschlecht* = *Geschlecht* [human species = sex]). The consideration of sexual morality by the masses takes place through the screen.”⁵⁶ The screen itself is the enabling device for mass sexual consciousness to cognize itself and thereby, through this movement, produce the reactive dimension of custom, in other words, popular morality:

Thus the mass characteristics of film appeal to the general sensibilities of the members of a society (their sense of actuality, their sense of custom, their eroticism and so on), and precisely at the point when these sensibilities migrate over into ethics, the sense of morality, and social thought, their mass essence is revealed.⁵⁷

It is this relation of the kinetic-affective form of custom to the diegetic appearance of custom on the screen that fundamentally concretizes film’s particular and unique realism. That is, “the cinema shows us what our consciousness is. Our consciousness is an effect of montage. There is no continuous consciousness, there are only compositions of

⁵⁵ Tosaka, *THZ* 4: 287.

⁵⁶ Tosaka, *THZ* 4: 288.

⁵⁷ Tosaka, *THZ* 4: 288.

consciousness... There is only collage, cutting, and splicing.”⁵⁸ I will return to this “splicing” shortly, as it is the central argument of Tosaka’s understanding of historical temporality, but in examining this element of custom within film, we can clearly see that Tosaka’s historical materialism is something quite different from the expected 1930s Comintern-style “philosophy of history.” Having said that however, I think we can also say that it is significantly *more* radical, and further, suggestive of a far more comprehensive grasp of the materiality of social relations, bound together by the force of Tosaka’s affirmative sense of historical vitality. In short, we can consider Tosaka, like Tarde, who always spoke of the “great stream of custom” (*grande fleuve du coutume*), a decisive thinker of the “history of the materialism of affect,” a materialism “of the incorporeal and virtual,” someone who thus posed an alternative point of entry and line of inquiry into the constitution of the social by emphasizing the materiality of the *affective* element of social relations.⁵⁹ Tosaka both insists on the fundamental and central materiality of an apparently immaterial register of affects, customs, norms, sensations, sentiments, reactions, tendencies, feelings, etc precisely by demonstrating how these seemingly immaterial elements operate materially in the filmic situation. That is, by extension, Tosaka locates the essential dimension of film not in immateriality, nor simply in a substantialized sense of materiality, but in the dimension of matter that exists precisely *in* immateriality, that is, the subjective moment of matter, not its natural-scientific “objective” presence. This demonstrates to us again the subtle but total difference between what I have called Tosaka’s “refraction theory” of knowledge from Lenin’s conception of reflection in consciousness of the dominant relations of the mode

⁵⁸ Paul Virilio and Sylvère Lotringer, *Pure War* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), 49.

⁵⁹ Maurizio Lazzarato, “Gabriel Tarde, un vitalisme politique,” postface to *Œuvres de Gabriel Tarde*, vol. 1 (Paris: Les empêcheurs de penser en ronde, 1999), 105; 150.

of production.

What Tosaka discovers in the refraction of sociality through the camera lens is that “the oscillating image, seeking to render visible the invisibility of time, moves between the inhuman (the non-human becomings, the durations which supersede our own) and the human (the limit of our representations), the world of angels (with its absolute memory, able to preserve the monumental and the insignificant) and the world of men (immersed in a time which both constitutes them and exceeds them).”⁶⁰ In other words, the formation-process and combination-process of pure singularities (intensities, bodies, organs, surfaces, affects, expressions) on the screen is the operative moment which opens and shows forth the figurational character of the materiality of the present. Thus, it is not that film is merely one site in which we can glimpse the figuration of social life through custom, but rather its essential site:

The artistic novelty and futurity of film is completely rooted in its portrayal of custom through the camera. Film is the quintessential destiny (*uttetsuke no shukumei*) of custom precisely because when the camera’s function of reproducing the present (*jisshateki kinō*) is called forth and turned towards the depiction of the social, it immediately becomes a direct depiction of custom itself.⁶¹

Rancière has effectively summarized this “destinal” element of film, the quality of the film-image which presents itself as the quintessence of the social field and its “infinity” of multiplications and figurations: “Its destiny is to couple this infinity to the order of its own infinity: that of the infinitely small that is equal to the infinitely large. Its exemplary expression is to be found in the “crystal-image,” in the crystal of thought-image that links the actual image to the virtual one, and that differentiates them in their very

⁶⁰ César Guimarães, *Imagens da memória: entre o legível e o visível* (Belo Horizonte: Editora UFMG, 1997), 236.

⁶¹ Tosaka, *Ninshikiron to wa nani ka* (1937) in *THZ* 3, 430.

indiscernibility, which is also the indiscernibility of the real and the imaginary.”⁶² This indiscernability was extensively examined by Tosaka earlier, in his discussion of the inability to differentiate on the level of genre the filmic-cognitive operation of documentary and fiction, precisely because in both cases, the image as bearer of the materiality of the social field still circulates on the screen identically. Hence, the decisive move in Tosaka’s understanding of film-function comes in his location of it within the field he calls “custom.”

Only through clarifying how it is that custom constitutes the essential lens through which the specifically *material* aspect of the film situation operates, can we clarify in the final analysis why film is such a crucial laboratory for Tosaka’s understanding of historical materialism. In this vein, Harootunian reminds us of an important theoretical vantage point on this question, by arguing that for Tosaka, “custom is society’s physiognomy, its visage (recalling Benjamin’s identification of dates as the physiognomy of history).”⁶³ Let us return to the earlier example I mentioned of Tosaka’s highlighting of the various intensities dispersed in film’s calculus of aesthetic subtraction and social recombination: “the newspapers do not tell us what manners of speech are employed, or what color eyes can be seen among the masses in a social event, or in the actions of the masses in a plaza,” rather it is “the camera which presents to us precisely this sort of crucial literary spectacle.”⁶⁴ What is at work here for Tosaka, and in the “quintessential destiny” (*uttetsuke no shukumei*) of film, is essentially the problem identified by Deleuze and Guattari in the question of “faciality” (*visagéité*):

⁶² Rancière, *Film Fables*, 113.

⁶³ Harootunian, *History’s Disquiet: Modernity, Cultural Practice, and the Question of Everyday Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 143.

⁶⁴ Tosaka, *THZ* 4: 285.

If human beings have a destiny, it is rather to escape the face, to dismantle the face and facializations, to become imperceptible, to become clandestine, not by returning to animality, nor even by returning to the head, but by quite spiritual and special becomings-animal, by strange true becomings that get past the wall and get out of the black hole, that make *faciality traits* themselves finally elude the organization of the face.⁶⁵

Tosaka's interest in faciality traits as depicted in the filmic situation stems from the fact that as these traits are re-imaged in the film's reproduction of the present (*jisshasei*), they constitute new lines of intensity on the screen surface, and it is precisely in the film, that as intensities, these faciality traits can exceed, or "elude," the hegemony of the organization of the face. Tosaka draws our attention to this moment for its essential materiality, that is, the fact that in this filmic conjuncture, wherein the previously composed elements of a face shed their accepted roles and improvisationally recompose themselves in different articulations, we see the creative potential of historical life itself. This faciality in Tosaka's consideration of the filmic situation shows us therefore that "the materiality of the commonplace, in which practices are repeated, is never completed, always constitutes a partial historicization, and stands in opposition to the lofty and the profound world beyond custom that is premised on fullness and completion."⁶⁶ We should underline here the dynamics of verticality: Tosaka absolutely refuses in his theoretical framework the logic of depth, preferring to always read the inscribed surface of the social field, this "ciphering" (*chiffnage*)⁶⁷ of the surface which characterizes the filmic situation. That is, the reason Tosaka pays particular attention to the cinema is that what is new in film is not inherently the technical apparatus, or the technological level

⁶⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille plateaux* (Paris: Minuit, 1980), 209; *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 171.

⁶⁶ Harootunian, *History's Disquiet*, 147.

⁶⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille plateaux*, 215; *A Thousand Plateaus*, 175.

required for the projection-event. Rather it is the “discovery-exploration” of the *socius*, the social body itself, its “elements, surfaces, volumes, and thicknesses,”⁶⁸ the “ground of embodiment” (*gushōsei no jiban*), the stratum of bodily traits that have dispersed as intensities and recombined in new fragments of social materiality.

This social, in fact, *historical* aspect of the filmic situation stems from the employment of a new form of abstraction (as in the making of various dispersed intensities out of the facial trait, intensities that can exceed the face-form) which allows film to encounter the social field, and simultaneously function as an organ of its recomposition. Thus Tosaka argues:

However, it is not merely that it is essential for the distinction of various cultural modalities (modalities of cognition) – it is essential because the ground of the operation of abstraction is contained within the function of cognition or the means of cognition. The cinema (not necessarily what we merely understand by “film” as one modality of culture) must possess a unique form of abstraction in order to operate as a function of cognition or means of cognition. Perhaps we might say that this abstraction itself is a mediation that connects film to other means of cognition.⁶⁹

We should recall here the importance for Marx of abstraction, the fact that the decisive shift in his critique of the hitherto existent political economy can be cast precisely as a problem of how abstraction operates within the social field, that is, not at a remove from the situation, but immanent to its very reproduction:

Capital as self-expanding value embraces not only class relations, a society of a definite character resting on the existence of labor in the form of wage-labor. It is a movement, a circuit-process (*Kreislaufsprozeß*)... Therefore it can be understood only as a movement, not as a thing at rest. Those who regard the gaining by value of independent existence (*die Verselbständigung des Werts*) as a mere abstraction forget that the movement of industrial capital *is this abstraction*

⁶⁸ Foucault, “Sade, sergent du sexe” in *Dits et écrits*, t. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), 1688-1690; “Sade: Sergeant of Sex” in *Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, vol. 2, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1998), 227.

⁶⁹ Tosaka, *THZ* 4: 469.

*in actu.*⁷⁰

Tosaka's emphasis on the recomposition, specific to film, of matter in movement can be read, in a sense, as a close, dislocational reformulation of Marx's essential methodological point here:

Appearance (*keisō*) and form (*keishiki*) emerge from matter. This is a necessary movement, one prior even to the sense of matter as being. Matter must signify movement itself precisely in as much as it instaurates its own form through a self-development. Thus matter is a type of content that attributes form to itself through its own particular movement.⁷¹

Matter, as it appears in the filmic situation, is not a referent. It is not the case that film merely "alludes" to the material. Fundamentally, film demonstrates to us that matter, the materiality that is most concrete, most fundamental to the problematic of historical materialism, is precisely this filmic matter; in other words, matter is movement itself. The recomposed intensities on the film screen oscillate and shift phase in a transformational and improvised circuit-process (*Kreislaufsprozeß*) in which matter emerges from cognitive rhythm itself. But let us examine more closely Tosaka's particular understanding of matter as a problem. In taking up a materialist analysis of Heidegger in his 1936 *Lectures on Contemporary Materialism*, Tosaka explains his understanding of materiality (*busshitsusei*) in general, in particular in relation to what he calls "everyday space" (*nichijōteki kūkan*) and "space itself" (*kūkan jitai*):

⁷⁰ Marx, *Das Kapital*, bd. 2 in *MEW*, bd. 24, 109; *Capital*, vol. 2 in *MECW*, vol. 36, 110. Translation modified.

⁷¹ Tosaka, *Gendai yuibutsuron kōwa* (1934) in *THZ* 3, 272. We should pay close attention to the term "appearance" (形相 *keisō*) here, which can also be read (形相 *gyōsō*), a term whose everyday meaning could function as a quite accurate translation of exactly what Deleuze and Guattari intend by "faciality" (*visagéité*). This materiality of the movement specific to film should be closely connected to Marx's analysis of the form of value, something Deleuze's work makes clear. On this point, see Nagahara Yutaka, "Shinimateki kachi keitairon: Sobyō" in *Gendai shisō*, vol. 36-15 (Tokyo: Seidosha, December 2008), 100-111.

The material cannot be clearly apperceived as belonging to universal philosophical categories through the common-sense concept of matter. Thus it often loses sight of the connections between everyday space and other phenomenal forms of space (since what provides these connections is the materiality that is always-already contained within everyday space), and confuses it with the concept of physiological matter (*butsurigakuteki busshitsu*). In contrast we must cognize the materiality possessed by space itself (its *Da*-character) as the most transparent and primal. The nature of space itself is this primal, ultimate materiality (matter as philosophical category), a materiality that comes *from matter itself*.⁷²

What Tosaka intends by this formulation was also extensively theorized by his contemporary theorist Kakehashi Akihide (also a member of *Yuiken*), who throughout his writing continually emphasized the point that “matter must be understood as simultaneously noematic *and* noetic.”⁷³ The traditional understanding of matter as merely noematic, in other words, as simply that which is experienced, as dependent on the perceiving subject, cannot account for the materiality of the filmic situation. Rather, the matter encountered through the prosthetic cognitive organ of the screen, and the diegetic “reproduction of the present” which interacts with the broad social field, is a materiality which is both noematic and simultaneously noetic, that is, this matter itself is subjective; this matter itself is experiencing materiality in as much as the screen is the organ which thinks on behalf of the viewer, thereby opening breaches of access to a zone of historical flux. “The absolute cannot be something non-determined but ought to be something capable of determination. In other words, it is absolute, not absolute nothingness. This was Lenin’s philosophical concept of matter. Even if we say that this matter, which Lenin

⁷² Tosaka, *Gendai yuibutsuron kōwa* (1936) in *THZ* 3, 264. On Tosaka’s understanding of space, and in particular, its commonalities with Deleuze’s theoretical investigations, see Koizumi Yoshiyuki’s “Chokkan kūkan to nōkūkan: Tosaka Jun to Durūzu” in *Gendai shisō*, Vol. 34-8 (July 2006), 158-171.

⁷³ Kakehashi Akihide, “Nishida tetsugaku o tataeru” in *Gakusei hyōron* (May 1937), reprinted in *Kakehashi Akihide keizai tetsugaku chosakushū*, vol. 5 (Miraisha, 1987), 345.

made a philosophical concept, should be determinant, this does not indicate that it is simply objectively (*taishōteki ni*) determined. In noematic determination, by merely relativizing the absoluteness of matter, only its natural-scientific concept emerges. As something self-moving, absolute matter must be something in which the self continually determines the self itself.”⁷⁴ Here and on this point, Tosaka – in this beautiful expression of affirmation for the social itself – emphasizes that such an experience of the noetic element of matter is gained precisely through the cognitive prosthesis of the cinema screen, the organ which alters and recomposes the essential rhythm of movement of social intensities, the organ through which we can encounter this noetic matter as movement itself:

In terms of natural phenomena, it is the screen that teaches humans the goodness of the materiality of the world, the joy of the movement of matter. By and large, we observe these things everyday, but this element of goodness, this joy, actually occurs to us first when it appears on the screen. Movement is a language in which matter speaks through a body (*undō wa busshitsu ga mi o motte kataru kotoba da*).⁷⁵

This affirmation of matter as movement on the screen demonstrates to us the “joy” of materiality – what Tosaka intends by this formulation is precisely that such a materiality of the rhythm of movement, the pulsations and patterns of the social composition of historical materiality itself, shows us the zone of flux, it shows us how much power we have and how little we need to respect the inherited figurations of social life. Benjamin famously identified the same unique element of film as a “room for play” (*Spielraum*), exactly what I have referred to here as the space of partial determinacy which the filmic situation produces in its interchange with the social field as a whole: “What is lost in the withering of semblance, or decay of the aura, in works of art is matched by a huge gain in

⁷⁴ Kakehashi, *Kakehashi Akihide keizai tetsugaku chosakushū*, vol. 5, 350.

⁷⁵ Tosaka, *THZ* 4: 286.

room for play (*Spielraum*). This space for play is widest in film. In film, the element of semblance has been entirely displaced by the element of play.”⁷⁶ Benjamin here asks us to heed the “play” that constitutes the forces of historicity itself, in other words, we must pay close attention in this question to “the cinema’s historical dimension. The indexically inscribed contingency is not the embodiment of history as the mark of the real or referent, but history as the mark of what could have been otherwise.”⁷⁷ At the center of this marking of history, and the essential role of film in illustrating it, is the question of time.

Tosaka theorized at length the definition of temporality itself, the differentiation of “time” from “temporality” as defined by the “splice” (*kizami*).⁷⁸ While I will not extensively examine this theory of the “splice” itself, let us immediately notice that this theoretical grasp of the structure of temporality can be read as inspired by, or as a direct analogy to the filmic situation, wherein the splicing or cut is precisely the material practice which allows the filmic time of the screen as well as diegetic time to distinguish itself from (yet image itself as commensurable with) everyday social time: “the cut is the mechanism whereby temporality becomes a product of the apparatus, repudiating the role of cinema as a record of a time outside itself. The cinema becomes a Freudian time machine rather than the pure promise of an indexical link to the referent.”⁷⁹ Through the splice or cut, history itself becomes a possibility, the infinite multiplication of the hazard inscribes itself in the very center of experience. In the film, “though elided by continuity, and even by the temporal proximity of instantaneous juxtaposition, the splice always

⁷⁶ Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 127.

⁷⁷ Doane, *Emergence of Cinematic Time*, 231.

⁷⁸ Tosaka, “Nichijōsei no genri to rekishiteki jikan” in *Gendai tetsugaku kōwa*, THZ 3: 96-97. I would like to acknowledge discussions with Travis Workman on this point.

⁷⁹ Doane, *Emergence of Cinematic Time*, 224.

inscribes a fissure of discontinuity.”⁸⁰ Even in the situation of the film without splicing, as in the long single uncut take, the splice is effected through different visual, aural, and kinetic intensities that make the diegetic situation commensurable with the social field in general. In other words, this splicing, in a sense, is “the property which allows the cinema to actualize the past (not because the image of the cinema is always in the present, but because the past, without the need to utilize a primary procedure such as the image-flux, can be represented such as the present is).”⁸¹ Therefore, in as much as the splice is what effects the operation of time, and produces the temporality of the everyday, its filmic mirroring effect through the cut shows us a rhythmic-kinetic-affective surface, the filmic screen, on and through which the volatility and hazardous oscillation of life, that is, the everyday, takes place. In this “principle of the everyday,” lies “the crystallized core of historical temporality (*rekishiteki jikan no kesshō no kaku*), the *secret* of history (*rekishi no himitsu*).”⁸² Film’s role here is in its doubling effect. In as much as the projection situation “shows” us a diegetic time and space wherein things are composed differently, the filmic situation as a whole, through the prosthesis of the screen, shows us its own process, whereby the screen watches and cognizes the diegetic situation, rotating and generating a partially formed social field which imbricates itself with our own: that is, “film always constitutes the history, the documentary of its fiction.”⁸³

Tosaka calls this everydayness as seen in the film-form his “formula for historical

⁸⁰ Malcom Le Grice, “Towards Temporal Economy” (1980) in *Experimental Cinema in the Digital Age* (London: British Film Institute, 2001), 208.

⁸¹ Guimarães, *Imagens da memória*, 183.

⁸² Tosaka, *THZ* 3: 101.

⁸³ André Gaudreault, “The Cinematograph: A Historiographical Machine” in *Meanings in Texts and Actions: Questioning Paul Ricoeur*, ed. David E. Klemm and William Schweiker (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1993), 95.

materialism” (*yuibutsushikan no kōshiki*),⁸⁴ a formula that we ourselves must extend and develop. Jacques Rancière has brilliantly outlined the sense of history such a new formula for historical materialism would require. The film-form as an organ of cognition teaches us that such a conception of history could never be the linear history of the development of the productive forces, nor the “*histoire événementielle*” consistently dismissed by Braudel as a theoretical triviality; in other words, this sense of history could never be a history of “conquerors” but rather must be a history of “the intertwined multiplicity of epochs, gestures, objects, and symbols of ordinary human life.” Film “allows all these forms to be associated and inter-expressed in an indefinite number of combinations, and it also ensures that every one of these combinations can express the collective life that threads together every fact, ordinary object, elementary gesture, speech, and image, whether banal or extraordinary. This particular co-belonging of forms and experience has gone by the very specific name of *history*. It’s over two centuries now since history has designated not the narrative of things past, but a mode of co-presence, a way of thinking and experience the co-belonging of experiences and the inter-expressivity of the forms and signs that give them shape.”⁸⁵ Tosaka shows us in his reflections on film how this sense of history as zone of recompositional possibilities, which is the elemental center of the filmic situation, can be a critical point for a renewed conception of historical materialism, one that would begin from the real movement of matter as the space of partial determinacy, a space which, as the film-form demonstrates to us, is always open, always contains a flux that is passing through it.

To consider seriously the decisive practical consequences of the filmic situation

⁸⁴ Tosaka, *THZ* 3: 104.

⁸⁵ Rancière, *Film Fables*, 177.

outlined by Tosaka would be nothing less than to conceive of a politics today “not as a normative totality to be realized in the future, but as a movement in the present of forms of life, culture, and production subtracted from the totality of capital. This movement in the present is itself a form of life that autonomously establishes its own rules and conflicts in order to defend their autonomy, and through this conflict forces capital to modify its equilibrium and its modality of reproduction.”⁸⁶ In the possibility of thinking towards such a political moment, we may have to wager with Tosaka on the strength of this old term: history. But the problematic of the grasp of the essential materiality of social life that Tosaka articulated through the example of the film as crucial for an understanding of his own conjuncture remains just as decisive for us. Only by holding ourselves immanent to the essential materiality of our everyday historical potential, and the self-movement of this relational space within the realm of image, affect, and custom can we also glimpse the possibilities for a new sociality, the endless zone of recombination which is the potential of historical life itself. Tosaka does not ask us merely to pay attention to film – rather I think we can say that in parallel with Bifo above, Tosaka exhorts us to *live filmically*, to live *in* history, in its material flows and effects, in the hazardous and fluctuating field of the social. In short, he demands that we inhabit a densely layered surface on which we inscribe a set of *political practices of life*: this demand reaches us today at a time when its exigency is vital. In an era in which we have no choice but to live – one of the shrinking nature of the commodity-unit and its increasing concentration, the fertile and intensive space of the image and its ubiquitous circulation-time, but also an era in which the expansion of global reaction accompanies a

⁸⁶ Franco Berardi (Bifo). *Il sapiente, il mercante, il guerriero: Dal rifiuto del lavoro all'emergere del cognitaro* (Rome: DeriveApprodi, 2004), 167.

situation wherein “the conditions for the capitalization of surplus value clash increasingly with the conditions for the renewal of the aggregate capital”⁸⁷ – this demand of Tosaka, put forward not in the form of an injunction, but in the example of his own theoretical practice, could not be more urgent.

It is this basic possibility that is given to us through these producers of concepts such as Uno, Tosaka, Yamada, Tanigawa, and so on. They remind us that the sublime perversion of capital, otherwise known as our modernity, is a recurrent and spiralling nightmare that invests all fields of human historical life, but they also teach us something crucial and hopeful: because capital’s sublime perversion, its capacity to recode the social basis in its image, can never be severed or completely divorced from *history* – although it is always attempting to push itself toward this direction of purity, while shrinking from its suicidal implications – capital is always exposed to a certain undecidability that gives force and potential to the possibility of other social arrangements. All of these thinkers, located across the spectrum of modern Japanese social thought, remind us that, following Rancière above, the name *history* is simply a designation for a “mode of co-presence,” one in which our lives are linked in innumerable ways to the entirety of the cycle of social reproduction, a fact that teaches us that history never testifies simply to the development of necessities, but rather to the openness of social practice, the openness of struggle.

⁸⁷ Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital* (London: Routledge, 2003), 347.

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